

LIFE

*Beyond the
Boundary of
Cricket*

DR. N I PRODHANI



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Stories Matter

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Preface

A pen is a silent instrument, yet its power is immeasurable. In some hands it sings as a gentle melody, shaping thoughts into beauty and wisdom. In other hands it becomes merely a signature on greed and ambition. Sometimes it rests quietly in the pocket of a humble shopkeeper calculating accounts; at other times it travels across continents in the pocket of a nation's president. Though voiceless and simple, the pen remains one of the most powerful instruments ever created.

In the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, it became a weapon of truth and non-violence. In the hands of poet Nilim Kumar, it turns words into delicate webs of poetry. The pen records knowledge, preserves memory, and guides education. It can also capture the failures and contradictions of history with the same honesty. The pen itself is never guilty; it merely reflects the human mind behind it. With this awareness, I felt compelled to take up the pen and write this story.

This book is a semi-autobiographical narrative about a small village cricket team from Bhomrabil, a remote corner of Assam, who played and practiced together between 1994 and 2004. I was born in one of the most underdeveloped regions of the state, where opportunities were limited and life moved at a slower but harsher rhythm. Our parents struggled with poverty and illiteracy, yet they understood the value of education better than anyone.

Growing up, we lived between two worlds: our deep passion for cricket and the expectations of our elders who believed education alone could secure our future. Our guardians worked tirelessly as farmers, shopkeepers, and daily wage earners, struggling to support their families. To them, education represented stability and dignity, while cricket seemed such as a risky distraction. But for us, cricket was more than a game, it was our greatest source of joy.

There were no smart phones or internet connections in our childhood. We learned the game by watching matches on flickering black-and-white televisions and practicing endlessly on our village ground. In our imagination, our small team from Bhomrabil was no less than the Indian team that won the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup under the leadership of M. S. Dhoni, alongside legends such as Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Virat Kohli, and Yuvraj Singh. Their triumph symbolized the dreams of millions.

In our own humble world, we too believed we had a “dream team.” We were not professionals, yet we played with the same passion and devotion. Our journey was shaped by dusty playgrounds, homemade strategies, and the unbreakable friendship of village boys.

In this story I represent the character “Dhoni,” not as the famous cricketer himself but as a symbol of the boy I once was, full of determination and dreams. The captain of our team, however, was “Nehra,” Dhoni’s closest friend. Their friendship and leadership form the emotional center of this narrative.

Yet life rarely follows the path we imagine. After 2006, the character of “Dhoni” gradually transforms into “Pandya,” who eventually becomes a doctor. That transformation reflects my own life. Between 2004 and 2006, I stepped away from cricket and chose a different path, the path of medicine.

This book, therefore, is not only about cricket. It is about childhood dreams, friendship and the delicate balance between passion and responsibility. Across India, millions of children dream of becoming cricketers, but only a few reach the national stage. The rest must reshape their dreams and discover new directions in life.

Dreaming is important, but self-awareness is equally essential. Not every dreamer can cross a raging river without understanding its depth and current. Knowing when to reshape a dream is not weakness, it is wisdom.

Some imperfections in this story are intentional, as it is the era of generation Z, a “wide ball” in cricket that appears to be an error but is actually a strategy to disturb a batter’s rhythm of confident players like Abhishek Sharma. In the same way, certain moments in this narrative may appear imperfect, but they serve a purpose to highlight the part.

Ultimately, this is the story of a group of village boys who chased their dreams under the open sky of Bhomrabil and of one among them who learned that the field of life sometimes leads us to a destination very different from the one we first imagined.

The story unfolds in a cinematic style, as similar scenes from a film, one moment at a time

Acknowledgement

Every book is born not only from words, but from faith, patience, sacrifice and silent prayers. This novel is not merely a work of writing; it is a journey of my heart, a reflection of my struggles, dreams and unwavering hope. In a world that constantly tests our courage and determination, this work became my bridge among aspiration, passion and reality, between the life I lived and the life I dared to imagine. The drafting of the pages has been one of discovery and transformation. It has taught me endurance, deepened my understanding and gifted me an experience that I shall cherish for the rest of my life. This book is a treasure of memories and emotions and it carries within it the blessings of many souls who walked beside me.

First and foremost, I bow in humble gratitude to the Almighty God the Omnipotent and Omnipresent, whose invisible hand guided me through moments of doubt and exhaustion.

To my beloved wife, Dr R. Parvin, Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (Ayurveda), I offer my deepest and most heartfelt thanks. Her patience was my shelter, her encouragement my strength and her unwavering belief my greatest inspiration. Through every late night and every moment of hesitation, she stood beside me such as a steady flame that never fades. This work carries her silent sacrifices within its pages.

I am profoundly grateful to my dear friend, Mr Amrit Ch. Das, whose support and encouragement became a constant source of motivation. His faith in me is the boosting energy to move forward with confidence and determination.

And finally, to my family, my dearest mother and father, whose blessings are the roots of my existence; my brother, sister and cousins, whose soft spot has always surrounded me; and especially our little Nadia, whose innocent smile filled my weary days with light. I offer my deepest love and gratitude. Their trust in me became the wings that allowed me to dream and to achieve.

Whatever I am today is because of them. This book is as much theirs as it is mine.

With treasure, gratitude and a heart full of humility, I dedicate this work to all my friends who believed in me.

Prologue

From *Sheikh Hedayetullah*, Niribili, Chapar, Dhubri.

Dated, 13th March, 2026

It is a prestigious matter for me that I have been asked to write a "Foreword" for a semi- autobiographical novel "Life Beyond Boundary of Cricket" by Dr. N. I. Prodhani. Dr. Prodhani, the author, is a physician by profession. Physicians are usually deeply engaged in their demanding profession, dedicating most of their time to the care of patients. This book, however, stands as a fine example that evens a busy doctor, carrying a stethoscope and attending to countless responsibilities, can still find the time and passion to write about the society in which he lives.

When I first received the manuscript, I was somewhat surprised to see that the book was written in English. Nevertheless, without delay I began reading it. At first I thought that reading the manuscript might turn out to be a waste of time. But as I progressed through the narrative, I found myself deeply moved by the story. The narration stirred memories of my own life and the society in which I grew up.

The journey of the river-eroded Prodhani family from Gaspara village of Dhubri to Telipara village in Kokrajhar district of Assam is described in a way that evokes a strong sense of nostalgia. The narrative style is simple and lucid, making every line engaging and meaningful. This work is not merely a story; it is an exploration of human society, family relationships, and the economic struggles of rural

life and a vivid portrayal of a displaced family affected by river erosion.

Throughout the novel, the narrator skillfully appropriately highlights the ethnic identity of the Deshi community, portraying its rich cultural heritage, food habits, traditional attire and social customs. These descriptions add depth and authenticity to the narrative, allowing readers to connect with the cultural landscape of the region.

The story offering lessons of resilience and endurance were reflected through a cricket team stories.

In the concluding part of the book, the author has included a few poems of his own. These poems are also noteworthy and complement the emotional tone of the narrative.

There is no doubt that Dr. Prodhani is a promising novelist. With continued effort, he can further refine his style by avoiding repetition and polishing the narrative flow to make his writing even more compelling. His inspiring storytelling ability will undoubtedly grow stronger with time and readers can look forward to more works from him in the future.

I sincerely hope that readers will appreciate his writing and encourage him to continue his literary journey.

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Chapter 1

Echoes of the Past: The Stories That Shaped Our Family

Time: Between 1980-2003,

My father once told me, *“If you study every day, then going out to play won’t be a problem. But if you don’t study daily, cramming for just one day won’t help your career.”*

“The world is full of players, be the game changer.” **M.S. Dhoni**

(Inspirational quote from Social Media)

The Early Days of My Life: Where It All Began

The Big Umbrella: Joint Family

In the present age, the joint family has almost faded into the realm of imagination, a fragile dream drifting away from a disappearing past. To hold such a family together under one roof requires more than shared blood; it demands patience, wisdom, sacrifice and above all, a steady hand at the helm. For many years, our home was a place similar to that.

At its fullest, our household breathed with the lives of twenty to twenty-two people. My grandmother who was a magnanimous woman stood at its heart. Around her were my parents and my siblings, my eldest uncle and aunt with their three children, second uncle and aunt with two daughters, third uncle and aunt with a son, my youngest uncle, two hired helpers, distant relatives who stayed to manage the shop and my elder paternal aunt’s son. I speak of the year 2000, though even before that, the house was never truly quiet.

Our doors were always open, someone or the other was forever arriving; a relative from an aunt's home, a cousin from one of my grandmother's seven brothers families, or a guest whose presence turned ordinary days into festival days. As children we adored visitors not only for the stories and toys they used to bring but also for the sweets, snacks and small treasures that accompanied them. Their presence loosened the discipline of study, filled the house with noise and laughter and gave us a sense of celebration. Though it distracted us from our books, my grandmother and father felt bliss in hospitality.

For many years, a Hafizi madrasa teacher regularly shared his meals at our home. My father believed feeding people was a form of worship. The house was always crowded, always alive and running such a large household was no small task.

We grew much of our own food, rice and vegetables from our fields but essentials needs, fish, meat, spices, edible oil, kerosene oil and clothes had to be bought constantly. Every aunt had their needs; coconut oil for hair, creams and powders for daily use and essential things for my grandmother. To soften the weight of these expenses my father opened a small grocery shop so we could buy basic necessities at wholesale rates. Yet the cost of feeding so many mouths always outweighed the profit. Each month his modest salary quietly dissolved into the needs of the household.

Still one rule never changed; there was always fish or meat on the plate. My father believed saving money was meaningless if children were denied nourishment during their growing years. Festivals brought another test. During the Eid clothes had to be bought for everyone from infants to working hands. Often there was nothing left in my father's pocket. If a dress did not fit or please it had to be exchanged. With so many people even small tasks became complicated. His job was modest, shortages constant, yet together we built three houses and bought a little land, a quiet miracle born of collective effort.

Meals were moments of order within chaos. When the food was ready we children were seated in neat rows, each of us instinctively knowing our place. The fish was divided equally. If someone felt unhappy, my grandmother or an aunt would gently adjust the portions from their part. Then the men and helpers were served. Only after everyone else had eaten did the women sit down. By then little remained, perhaps a tail, a head, or a fragment of fish. Their fatigue was heavier than hunger. Cooking for such a family meant preparing four or five kilograms of rice each meal, endlessly cleaning grain, washing mountains of dishes, laundering clothes, only to begin again for the next meal.

Though separation crossed their minds, the women rarely spoke of it. The bond among my father and uncles were strong and none of them wished to break the family apart. Yet the silent truth of joint families is that the burden of labour rarely shared equally on each member. Some carry mountains while others walk lightly. As long as the burdened remain silent, harmony survives. But when exhaustion turns into pain and pain into speech, separation was inevitable with consensus.

As our family grew, my father and uncles finally decided to live separately. Perhaps it was the need of the hour to manage households better to educate children more fairly. When five families live under one roof, equality is an ideal difficult to practice.

Though my father was the head of the family, he never bought special food such as horlicks, fruits, or snacks, not only for us but for all. His sense of justice allowed no distinction. With many children to love, perhaps affection too had to be divided thinly. As the eldest I received more care and nourishment. My younger siblings received less, not from neglect but for limitation. Space for study, privacy and opportunity was scarce. Most of us grew up in my grandmother's room, shaped more by shared living than by individual comfort.

Yet my father's heart was wide. He cared for all my uncle's children as his own. Whenever he brought snacks or special seasonal fruits home he would call all of us together and we ran towards him resembling scattered birds. He took my cousins to school on his bicycle just as he did for us, no difference, no favour.

A joint family may be noisy, chaotic and demanding but it can also act as a living school. Children learn together, grow together and rise together. Even if one set of parents is uneducated, knowledge flows from those who have it. **My father had primary education and my mother had no formal education yet they laboured endlessly for our future.**

My grandfather once took over a wise decision, he sent my eldest uncle to live with his maternal uncle so he could study. Though my uncle later could not do physically demanding work as other uncles used to do, he became the foundation of our education. Through him we all rose, he is the main source behind our education and my father got contentment in this. Though he could not study much for himself, he dreamed fiercely of our education. He would say, **"Study well, and you can be an officer;** otherwise you will have to run a small shop as mine." He dreamed of me becoming a scientist, inspired by the educated people at his workplace whom he deeply admired.

Because of my uncle's dedication, many children in our village retrieved guidance and hope. We grew up not just as siblings and cousins but as members of a larger family. Even today **children are included in family discussions whenever needed.** From those conversations, I believe, is the true backbone of a joint family and we learned dialogue of life.

Even now when I return home my meal is ascertained at any of my uncles places. It feels as though we have five homes but one family. When each member fulfills their responsibility without resentment, a joint family moves forward like a train,

steady and unstoppable. No two contributions are the same, yet all are essential.

Though living in a joint family is difficult in today's world but it is not impossible. With education, financial stability, mutual respect and strong willpower, a joint family can still be not a relic of the past but a living and breathing example of shared humanity. It teaches a big moral of how we can live unity in diversity.

Flavors of the Past: A Journey Through Local History and Food

The Deshi Muslims are one of the indigenous communities of the undivided Goalpara district of lower Assam and the plains of the Garo Hills of present-day Meghalaya. The history of the community begins in the 12th century. In 1205 AD, after Qutbuddin Aibak took charge of the administration of India, his military commander, Bakhtiyar Khilji, was sent to invade Assam. Along with him army came an official historian named Minhaj-al-Siraj. He described Bakhtiyar Khilji's invasion of Assam in detail in his persian book Tabaqat-i-Nasiri. According to many writers, he became friendly with a local Mech king. This Mech king was attracted to Islam, accepted the religion, and adopted a new name-Ali Mech. Along with him, many of his subjects also embraced Islam. This marks the beginning of the history of the local Deshi Muslims.

From certain food items of the Goalpariya people, it can be understood that they lived on both sides of the Brahmaputra river and they have been flood-affected since ancient era. Below, some traditional food practices of the people are discussed to support the view. It is well known that the community have lived in lower Assam for many centuries. Some of their traditional food items are discussed below which will give a pellucid explanation of the topic.

Bhater mar (Rice water curry): This is a curry-like dish prepared from the leftover water after cooking rice. It was usually eaten when vegetables were not available, showing a **simple and resource-based lifestyle**.

Thakri kalai (Black lentil dal): This lentil grows mainly in sandy soil. It is always served in local weddings. This indicates that the people **lived in sandy riverine areas**.

Shidol (Fermented dried fish): It is assembled by grinding dried fish and shaping it into balls using taro leaves. These are stored and later used by mixing with vegetables. This dish indicates **settlement near fish-rich areas, especially the banks of the Brahmaputra in lower Assam**.

Shukteni (Dried jute leaf): This is a vegetable shaped from dried jute leaves. It has a bitter taste and is also used for medicinal purposes. It shows the **community's connection with jute cultivation**.

Nahul (Roasted rice powder): Roasted rice is sometimes eaten with red tea. This proves that the **community was mainly agriculture-based**.

Chira Doi (Flattened rice and curd): It is customary among the people to serve flattened rice with curd during weddings and festivals. This practice shows **cattle and buffalo rearing, as curd comes from milk**.

Gargari Pitha (Traditional sweet): This is prepared by boiling flour without sugar or oil and shaping it into balls. Similarly, steamed *pitha* (called *Tekeli pitha* in Assamese) is common. The limited use of oil and sugar indicates that **most people were economically poor**.

Athiya kol (A variety of banana): It is a variety of banana plants are still seen in the households. During floods, these banana trunks are cut and tied together to **make boat-alike rafts. This clearly shows life in flood-prone areas**.

Aam-katol (Mango and Jackfruit): Among fruits, mango and jackfruit were commonly eaten. These fruits are filling and

locally available, exported fruits are not popular again pointing to **a simple and poor lifestyle.**

Ponta bhat (Overnight soaked rice): Rice soaked in water overnight and eaten in the morning. Agricultural workers ate it before going to the fields early in the morning, especially during busy **farming seasons. It also saved times and fuels during the rainy season.**

Kauner bhat (Fox tail millet): During period of rice shortage, a local grain grown in **char areas was used as rice.** Today, this practice has almost disappeared due to the introduction of modern rice varieties.

From all these food habits, it can be clearly understood that the people have **lived for centuries on both sides of the Brahmaputra river in flood-prone areas of lower Assam.** Their lifestyle was mainly agriculture-based. Language, culture and traditions also provide strong evidence that the people are an inseparable part of Assam.

From Riverine to Plains: The Migration of the Family

The surname Prodhani holds a place of distinct honour within the Desi community. Owing to deep historical roots of shared language, culture and tradition similar to the Koch–Rajbongshi society. They are almost indistinguishable in their folk beliefs, rituals, customs, artistic expressions, folk songs and musical instruments. Modern Assamese linguists recognise the language as the Goalpariya dialect. This language has never been confined to a single community; rather, it has long been the spoken language of people belonging to all faiths and groups in the region. One of its most remarkable features is its continuity, its form has remained largely unchanged for thousands of years. It is worth mentioning that the legendary cultural icon **Padma Shree Dr Bhupen Hazarika named these folk songs as Goalpariya folk songs** after hearing them sung in the

mellifluous voice of **Padma Shree Pratima Baruah Pandey** from the royal family of Gauripur in Western Assam.

The community follows social customs and traditions almost identical. While religious differences have led to variations in death rituals in recent times, customs associated with childbirth and marriage have remained largely unchanged for centuries and are still widely practised today.

For example, before a wedding the bride is ceremonially anointed with turmeric while special songs are sung, this ritual is known as Singrani. On the wedding day a sacred arrangement called Shatashi is prepared at the bride's home, using banana bark wrapped around a winnowing tray, decorated with betel leaves, areca nuts and paddy stalks. Wedding songs as "Gao halani diya nach re Golapi..., Golapike site sendur golapika dibona. " - which means, "Dance Rosy dance moving you body...", form an inseparable part of the ceremony

Even today, striking similarities can be seen in the surnames used by Deshi Muslims and Koch-Rajbongshi people. Among them, Prodhani and Sarkar carry particular prestige. The title Prodhani was bestowed by the King of Gauripur upon zamindars without any consideration of religion. As a result, both Hindu and Muslim Goalpariya people bear this surname. Among the principal surnames of this community are Prodhani, Joddar, Bepari, and Sarkar. **My story begins in one such Prodhani family.**

Coming to my story, at the western most edge of Dhubri district, near the Assam-Bangladesh border in Assam, north of the Brahmaputra river, lay the village of Gaspara. There lived a highly respected zamindar family-the Prodhanis. The head of the family was Sabed Ali Prodhani in those days, around 1970. According to my grandfather's recollections, the family owned vast agricultural land and even had a motor vehical- jeep, a extraordinary luxury in those days.

The household bustled with servants and visitors. Beyond the living quarters, there were separate resting rooms and guest chambers. Cows, buffalo, bullock carts and buffalo carts filled the courtyard. In every sense it was an aristocratic family of its epoch. The family had a healthy cordial relation with the courts, administrative offices and the police. Though formal education was lacking, life passed comfortably enough that the absence of education was never truly felt, perhaps that was their greatest mistake. Then, one day disaster struck.

A violent land dispute erupted, a quarrel which in those days meant a situation akin to warfare amid rival factions. The conflict led to many injuries. At the same moment nature turned hostile too, floods and the relentless erosion of the Brahmaputra took on a terrifying form. Caught between human violence and natural devastation, the family was completely shattered.

Every member of the family had been straightforward, simple, honest and upright. According to my grandmother, **my grandfather never distinguished between Hindus and Muslims**, he treated everyone with the same compassion and helped anyone in distress. No visitor ever left the house without being fed and feeding the poor gave him immense joy.

Defeated by the combined cruelty of conflict and the Brahmaputra's fury, my grandfather was forced to leave Dhubri district and migrate to Kokrajhar district of Assam. All he could carry with him was a bullock cart, my grandmother and their seven children- five sons and two daughters. Their wealth was gone but their hearts still carried an ocean of dreams for the future.

They settled in a small village called Telipara in Kokrajhar district. The transition from a life of royalty to one resembling that of a beggar, truly a refugee was unimaginably painful. There was no rice to eat, no house to live in, no proper clothes to wear and even drinking water was scarce, which had to be fetched from the river. Supporting seven children under such conditions was an overwhelming struggle.

My father, the eldest son understood that responsibility does not arrive gradually, it descends suddenly and without warning. He left his studies midway through secondary school and began working to support the family. Seeing the hungry faces of his younger siblings he sacrificed his education and joined a timber company to assist my grandfather as a cash cow. After a full day of labour he would return home in the evening carrying broken discarded pieces of wood on his head to build the walls of their makeshift home. Still poverty proved stronger than their efforts.

My eldest uncle lived with his maternal uncle so that he could continue his education and perhaps became someone of consequence. The second uncle had to abandon school at the primary level due to financial hardship and was employed as a working boy in the house of a wealthy marwari family.

The third uncle was clever and resourceful. Despite immense perplexity, he continued his education while simultaneously working as a kerosene oil dealer. The youngest uncle, the beloved child of the household remained immersed in studies and sports.

Just as leaves begin to fall with the arrival of autumn, it felt as though autumn had descended upon the Prodhani family's fate.

During Eid, uncle Majibor and my two aunts went door to door asking for charity, as was customary in phases of extreme need. Uncle was quick-witted, told each household that the three of them belonged to different families so they could collect more charity. Such was their poverty that even shopkeepers refused to sell clothes on credit.

Yet my grandfather remained honest and courageous. People quickly came to trust him and friendships grew. Within a short time he was appointed *Gaonburab*- the village headman. My grandmother too devoted every ounce of her strength to holding the family together. With seven children staring at her

with hungry eyes, she buried her sorrow and endured every pain in silence.

Blossoms & Bright Days: The Family's Spring Revival

Spring in according to Ayurveda as per Charak samhita, season is divided into two phases- *Adan Kaal* (Northern solstice) and *Visarga Kaal* (Southern solstice). During *Adan Kaal*, nature's strength is drawn away by the sun as it moves northward making sunlight and wind more intense. The seasons of late winter, spring and summer come under this phase. During *Visarga Kaal* on the other hand is the cycle of release when nature gives back its energy to human life in the Indian subcontinent. As the sun moves southward and moonlight gets dominant, the seasons of monsoon, autumn and early winter unfold.

Just as spring arrives after autumn and tender green leaves begin to sprout, a similar spring seemed to arrive in the life of the Prodhani family after a long season of challenging period. From a classical perspective, it may have been the beginning of the monsoon, the season when strength slowly returns to the human body. But from nature's point of view, it was unmistakably spring.

My grandfather, my father and my uncles had grown weary from relentless labour, yet poverty refused to loosen its grip. In 1988, devastating floods engulfed Assam, causing acute food shortages. People took shelter on roads, in schools and in government offices. The government distributed food through relief trucks, but hunger still claimed lives. My grandfather endured those brutal days with extraordinary resilience.

Witnessing the terrifying floods of the Brahmaputra in Dhubri, my grandfather at one time took over the difficult but wise decision to move to Kokrajhar district as flood was less compared to Dhubri. Within days, floodwaters began to recede there and people slowly ventured out in search of

work. My father's maternal uncles also arrived from Dhubri seeking employment and my grandfather joined them in labouring for construction works in the interior regions of Kokrajhar.

One morning during this fragile period a group of five or six people including government officials arrived at our village and summoned my grandfather. As the village headman, he was informed that the village would have to be vacated within a month, the land had been selected for the establishment of the Agricultural University. My grandfather asked, "Where will all these families go? Where will our children live?" The officials promised half a *bigha* of land per family in a distant village.

My grandfather refused. He said they had built this village with immense struggle, how could they abandon it overnight and start a new life without food, work, or certainty? The officials suggested that if the university were built, villagers could work there. My grandfather firmly countered that at least one person from each family must be given employment. Impressed by his clarity, courage and ability to unite the villagers, the officials agreed and promised jobs.

Though heartbroken at the thought of losing the village, my grandfather eventually reasoned that the university could benefit future generations. The villagers collectively decided to purchase nearby land and establish a new settlement. The land was rocky and forested but affordable. Money was scarce and during this point one of my grandfather's close friends helped him with a loan.

My grandfather frequently visited government offices and developed a strong friendship with a clerk who supported him during crises. To strengthen this bond, my grandfather arranged a close friendship between his eldest daughter and the clerk's daughter assembling them as shokhi-best friends by rituals. Eventually both the families developed close relations. Later, I met him outside the Gossaigaon Sub-Divisional Court, where he spoke with admiration about my

grandfather's wisdom, honesty and courage. All community people, Hindus or Muslims respected him.

Our family also shared deep bonds with the Devnath family of the village. Their children Tapan, Ratan, Jatan, Atashi, Tulsi, and Dipan were akin family to us. My grandfather played a vital role in establishing a primary school in the village, initiated by our family. Later, Tapan Devnath, my grandfather's friend's son, became the headmaster. I began my education there under Tapan Sir, though I always called him "uncle" out of affection.

As water scarcity plagued the village, my grandfather submitted a petition with signatures from all villagers and the government installed a well behind our house, as he was the village headman. The entire village depended on that one well for drinking water.

In a consistent the construction of the university began, villagers engaged in work as masons, easing hunger and hardship. From that stage onward, masonry flourished in our village, producing skilled contractors who thrive even today.

However, when promised jobs failed to materialise, my grandfather took a bold stand. He halted university construction work and demanded that employment promises be honoured. Officials responded by registering names and many villagers secured jobs. When asked to submit two names from his family, he wisely chose my father and my second uncle, both of whom had limited education and were struggling for survival. My father secured a permanent lower division assistant position, while my uncle received temporary employment.

Though modest, these jobs were like the first rainfall before spring, enough to awaken life. Slowly green leaves appeared, cuckoos began to sing, frogs croaked in the evenings, the family breathed fresh air of hope once again.

The university later allowed my grandfather to cultivate, only the profession he had carried from his ancestral home. Half

of the harvest went to the university; the rest sustained our family, hunger retreated and the family had a breezy hour.

My uncle left domestic servitude and joined the university as a temporary worker. Mornings were spent on ploughing the fields, afternoons at work, nights in exhausted sleep but with peace in their hearts. Livestock increased, farming expanded and eventually the family that onetime sent children as a helping hand began employing workers themselves.

On one occasion, a company of CRPF official requested bamboo and other materials from our land to build CRPF recruitment camps and to place their materiel. He also asked if we had eligible candidates to which my father recommended my 3rd uncle. He passed every test, running, long jump, high jump, earning selection into the Indian defence. Pride and fear arose in my father's heart as war loomed at that juncture between India and Pakistan.

As two of my uncles went outside, one for a defence job and the other for study from grandmother's place, responsibility grew heavier. My father opened a small grocery shop, selling on credit to employees until payday. Brick by brick, cement by cement, a permanent house rose, a symbol of survival, dignity and rebirth; a small shower had been enough to **signify spring arrival.**

The world of illiterate is itty-bitty

My mother was uneducated. She had never stepped into a schoolyard in her life. It felt as if the light of education had never entered her home. She did not know that the world had many languages. Hindi and English were far beyond her reach; she had never even learned the basic letters of her own language. From a young age, after losing her mother, she became quiet and reserved, keeping herself confined within her own small world.

She was monolingual, spoke only the local Deshi Goalpariya language and lived her entire life with a very limited

vocabulary. I never saw her a single time trying to speak Bengali or Hindi, even though Bengali-speaking people often visited our home. I, on the other hand have a habit of speaking to people in their own language but I am not claiming to be a polyglot. But my mother never tried to cross that boundary. **She was contented with a few vocabularies and chose to keep her world limited to it.**

Through the marriage process, she entered the family as the eldest daughter-in-law and with that came the burden of the entire household. My grandmother's body had been worn down by endless grueling work, carrying heavy loads of firewood from the hills without rest. Cooking for seven children and elders, fetching water from the river, pounding rice, cleaning grains, cutting firewood, her days were filled with labour.

My grandmother expected my mother to withstand all these responsibilities at the moment. A young girl who had grown up playing and laughing suddenly witnessed herself carrying the weight of a large household. She had no one to share her pain with, because she no longer had a mother of her own. A daughter-in-law usually can not easily open her heart to her mother-in-law; where one woman often considers the other one such as a stranger from another world. Had either of them been educated, perhaps understanding and friendship could have grown. But between two uneducated women with no knowledge about the present day society, friendship is often impossible.

In our community, the relationship between the wife of the elder brother and the younger "brother-in-law" is supposed to be playful and full of laughter, where mocking is normal and common. But my mother never understood jokes or teasing, she was shy, serious and quiet by nature. When others laughed during casual teasing, she often thought they were mocking her. She could not understand clever words, sarcasm or humour because of her limited language and lack of

emotional intelligence. From childhood she had lived a simple, silent life, preferring solitude and quiet similar to introvert.

When a television was brought into the house, everyone took pleasure in watching dramas, movies and later narrated the stories to her with excitement. But my mother never tried to understand what was shown on television. She believed that if she watched, people would laugh at her because she could not understand the language. This was not true, no one laughed at her but whenever someone laughed at a scene on television, she thought they were laughing at her. She could not understand what was happening on the screen.

Yes, my mother's world was truly teeny-tiny; her ignorance of language and words forced her to remain trapped within herself. My mother by nature calm and silent, never expressed her pain to anyone. Perhaps she trusted no one enough to open her heart and had no one to share her sorrows with. My father was burdened with work, earning money and running the household; had a little time to understand her.

In the succeeding days she became pregnant and after carrying the child for nine months, enduring immense pain, she gave birth to a baby boy at home. The pain of giving birth at such a young age needs no explanation. Since childhood, my mother had heard stories of her own mother's death during childbirth and that fear lived deep within her.

The birth of a son brought her brief happiness, she felt finally had something of her own in life. But that happiness did not last long. A few days later, one night, the baby suddenly stopped breathing. His heart stopped and lungs collapsed and had kissed goodbye. Perhaps he had an internal illness which my mother or family could not recognise. She lost her first child, as if a piece of her own body had been torn away.

She had no one to cry with, no one to call her own. A woman who valued silence now began talking to herself. During rest, while working, when sad or angry, she murmured her

thoughts aloud. Some distant relatives mockingly started pulling her leg by calling her “mad.”

There were other reasons people called her so; if teased too much, she would cry like a child. She did not know how to dress neatly and wore clothes in an unkempt way, also did not understand cleanliness or hygiene, not because she was careless but because no one had ever taught her.

After losing her first child, my grandmother sometimes blamed her saying she did not know how to care for a baby. My mother then buried herself even deeper in work, keeping her mind occupied while whispering her pain to herself. A year later I was born, fearing another loss, my grandmother took complete charge of my care and kept me away from my mother. My mother did not produce breast milk in the beginning so I was fed cow’s milk. Many food restrictions were imposed on my mother based on my grandmother’s past experiences. She acted with noble intentions though her lack of education led to misinterpretation.

Today, I understand that after losing first child, breast milk may take time to come for the second. Frequent skin contact helps milk production through hormones but my grandmother did not know this. She looked strict but she was kind- don’t judge a book by its cover; there was no fault in her heart, only the absence of education.

I grew up on cow’s milk, oil massages and sunbaths. I sucked my fingers constantly, a habit common in children deprived of breast milk. **Even today I struggle to break my habit of biting nails and the same has been passed unapologetically to my progeny.** People say childhood habits are challenging to let go, and I know that is true.

Being the elder child the family loved me dearly. My grandfather fed me from his own plate, lifting food to my mouth with his hands. I do not remember this but I inherited some of his habits such as during eating while separating fish

bones, I used to make a circle with that on the edge of my plate.

My grandfather passed away when I was about two years old from throat cancer. One time, I sighted his photograph and wanted to keep it, to which my grandmother said photographs of the dead should not be kept and asked me to burn it. I obeyed but the image remains in my memory-a tall, handsome man, trusted and adored by many.

After his death, my grandmother became more attached to me and cared for everything, my bathing, eating and even cleaning me. I was the apple of her eye. Slowly, my bond with my mother weakened. I heard many cruel remarks about her from my relatives such as **“Your mad mother is coming,”** or **“If you stay with her, you’ll also turn into mad too.”**

As a child, I disliked my mother’s habit of soliloquy- talking to oneself, continuously while working at home. I grew so attached to my grandmother that I considered her to be my mother. At the beginning, no one taught me to call my biological mother “Maa.” Perhaps they believed keeping me away from her was for my benefit. They did it out of love and affection towards me and no one to blame for that, it’s due to circumstances and situation. Later, when I grew up everyone tried to correct that but it was too late then. As distance had already emerged between us. I can recollect, I started calling my biological mother as “Maa” on the first day of matriculation examination and she seemed so happy to it.

The Cost of Pretending

In our village there lived a man who was completely illiterate. He could not even recognise the letters A, B or C. Yet deep inside he carried a silent desire to appear educated before others. One day while travelling by train, he noticed many passengers reading newspapers. Wanting to show that he too was literate, he bought an English newspaper. Holding it confidently in his hands, he pretended to read, turning the

pages slowly and nodding as if he understood every word printed there. In truth, he could not read a single word. As he flipped through the pages, his eyes fell upon a large picture of a green bus and he stared at it intensely. The bus in the picture appeared to be upside down, its wheels facing the sky. The man began to think deeply, "The bus looks perfectly fine, no parts seem broken or damaged, then how did it fall down like this? Perhaps many passengers were injured!" He continued staring at the image, puzzled and concerned.

Suddenly, a fellow passenger sitting beside him glanced over and said politely, "Sir, you are holding the newspaper upside down." Startled, the man quickly adjusted the paper to its correct position. Instantly, the bus appeared perfectly normal. It was not an accident at all; it was simply an advertisement for a new green bus service.

A wave of embarrassment washed over him. At that moment, he realised how foolish he had been. Pretending to be literate had only exposed his ignorance. **There is no shame in being uneducated, but there is shame in pretending to be something one is not.**

The Night of Fear

On another occasion, my CRPF uncle decided to teach this man a moral about arrogance and pretence. One night around 10 p.m., after the man had quarreled with his wife, had gone to her parents home, my uncle and one of his friends quietly went behind the man's house. Standing at a distance, they shouted in Hindi loudly so that he could clearly hear, "Is this the house of Mr Javed? We are from the police station. There has been a complaint filed against you by your wife!"

The moment the man heard the word "police," panic took over. Without waiting to confirm anything, he rushed out of the house and ran towards the nearby backyard bushes at the speed of lightning. Fear blinded his reason and he

disappeared into the darkness. From a distance, my uncle and his friend watched, half amused and half thoughtful.

These incidents reveal more than just humour; they reflect the vulnerable life of an illiterate person. Illiteracy not only limits knowledge but also creates fear, insecurity and a constant struggle to protect one's dignity. **Education is not merely about reading words on paper; it is about confidence, awareness, and understanding the world without fear.** And sometimes the desire to appear pseudo-intellectual can lead to greater embarrassment than ignorance itself.

Roots of Resilience: The Story of my Mother's Birth

My maternal grandfather was a kind-hearted and carefree man. He owned farmland and earned a living by farming. Near their house there was a large wetland where big fish were grasped throughout the year. My maternal grandfather and his friends impassioned in fishing and later kept it as a profession along with farming. He had a super-duper income and ran the household well and even could save money for festivals like Eid & Pushna utsav, which is a part of Bihu festival of the Assamese people.

He married a beautiful and loving woman from a nearby village, my grandmother. In those days a family that had rice, fish or vegetables in their home was considered wealthy and respected and overall it was a very happy family. The only thing missing was education. No one in the family had ever gone to school, still they never felt the lack of education.

One day suddenly my grandmother went into labour pain. It was moment for my mother to come into this world. My grandmother started crying out in pain. My grandfather ran to the far end of the village to call the village midwife. My grandmother's sister-in-law also came running after hearing the news.

As home delivery was common in those days, my grandfather hurried to arrange delivery items- old clean cloths, an old

blade, warm water, straw and other basic things. The labour pain became intense but the delivery was prolonged. Finally the midwife began pressing on my grandmother's stomach and told her to push strenuously such as defecation. My grandmother followed the instructions and pushed with all her strength.

My grandfather waited outside the house, extremely anxious. Suddenly the midwife shouted and the baby was born. The umbilical cord was cut with the old blade and the baby was cleaned and wrapped in old cloth. But the baby did not cry at first which worried everyone. The midwife gently tapped the baby's back and head, soon the baby cried loudly. That was my mother's birth, at home, in a dusty room. **Cry does not indicate that you are weak, since birth, it has always been a sign that you are alive.**

My grandfather silently thanked God with joy but that happiness was ephemeral. After delivery my grandmother's placenta did not expel completely and she began bleeding heavily. The midwife and her sister-in-law tried their level best to stop the bleeding but could not succeed. My grandfather was informed and even he tried to stop the bleeding by stuffing cloths inside but the bleeding did not stop. My grandmother's heartbeat increased and her eyes slowly started closing.

My grandfather rushed on his bicycle to bring the village doctor. Though he was called a doctor, he was actually a medical com-pounder with no formal degree but villagers depended on him in emergencies. When he arrived and checked on my grandmother he sadly said she had already passed away. Still he gave an injection as a last attempt.

Before the joy of my mother's birth could settle, my grandmother left this world forever. What was the new born's fault that she lost her mother at the moment of her birth? **Perhaps this was how my mother's fate was written to enter the world as a fighter from the very first day.**

My mother was then raised by her maternal aunt as foster child who never got mother's milk and grew up drinking cow's milk, resting in her aunt's lap. Even today, I wonder whose fault was it? The midwife's ignorance? My grandfather's decision to conduct the delivery at home? Or the poor state of healthcare of that era? The truth is, it was no one's personal fault. **It was the dark epoch of ignorance, lack of education and lack of medical awareness.**

Childhood play and not experiencing mothers love and care, helped her forget some of the pain of being motherless. Later, my grandfather remarried so that he would not have to live alone, and my mother gained a stepmother. After some time, a son was born to the new wife and gradually my mother began to receive less affection from her stepmother.

Three years later, my grandfather married again due to trivial reason. Later in life, he probably realised that marrying twice was a big blunder. **But errors always be rectified even with regrets.**

My mother now had two stepmothers yet the emptiness of her real mother could never be filled. Deep inside her heart the pain remained, she slowly became quiet and reserved. People misconception-ally considered her silence as a good manner and praised her as a very polite girl.

My Parents Marriage: A Age of Agreement

My paternal grandfather was quietly searching for a bride for my father. Someone told him about a girl in Kachari village, Kamandanga. She was beautiful, polite, meek, taciturn and motherless, raised by her aunt. My grandparents adored her immediately as everyone spoke well of her nature.. My grandmother wanted a beautiful daughter-in-law; my grandfather wanted a quiet, polite one, they also felt sympathy because she had no mother.

My father being an obedient son, agreed without much analysis of the pros and cons. My mother, who had never

gone to school, understood how important education was. Eventually, the marriage was fixed, and my mother became a member of the Prodhani family.

A Sudden Burden: The Weight of Responsibility

The carefree girl suddenly became the eldest daughter-in-law of a large family. It felt like a heavy load had been dropped on her head overnight. Daily work included carrying firewood from the hills, cutting wood, husking rice, cooking, washing utensils and clothes, fetching water from far away, feeding cattle, cutting grass, harvesting crops and drying straw, all responsibilities fell on her delicate shoulders.

She felt as if she had fallen from the sky into deep cold water, without knowing how to swim. She didn't even know how to cook properly yet she was expected to do all the household work. Her mother-in-law did not know how to show affection, even if she had love in her heart, she believed showing it would reduce her authority. One reason for the rigidity was also that she could not accept handing over her beloved son to another woman.

Breaking the Silence: Understanding Mental Illness

Just like physical health, mental health is very important for us. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), good health does not only mean the absence of physical illness. A person can be called healthy only when there is a balance between physical, mental and social well-being. For example, a person suffering from depression cannot be called healthy even if they have no physical illness. A mentally healthy person can maintain balance in their thinking, emotions, behaviour and personality. Such a person can solve life's problems properly and contribute positively to both personal growth and society.

A person suffering from mental illness loses control over emotions, thoughts, behaviour and personality. Mental illness can affect anyone, just like physical illness and it has many different types.

Although mental illnesses can be treated more than two-thirds of patients never seek treatment. The main reasons are ignorance, stigma and lack of awareness. As a result, not only the patient but the entire family suffers.

Causes of Mental Illness

Mental illness usually does not have one single cause. It develops due to the combined effect of different factors.

Biological Factors- researchers believe that if someone in a family has a mental illness, other **family members have a higher risk** of developing it. If both parents are affected, the risk increases further. Mental illness can also occur due to brain infections, head injuries, or changes in brain chemistry. In women, symptoms may appear during menstruation, pregnancy or after childbirth.

Psychological Factors- every person has a different personality, which affects their lifestyle and ability to handle stress. Extroverts are social, have many friends and express their feelings openly. They can usually handle stress better. **Introverts** prefer solitude, have fewer friends and find it difficult to express emotions. They often struggle more with stress and anxiety.

People who experience severe **childhood trauma**, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or the death of parents, are at higher risk of mental illness.

Neglect by family or society can also cause mental stress and low self-esteem. Events like the **death of loved ones** or separation can push a person toward mental illness.

Social Factors- humans are social beings. Events in society affect our emotions, thoughts and lifestyle. **Relationships**

with family, friends and colleagues are closely connected to our mental health.

Problems such as **financial difficulties**, family conflicts, relationship issues, and major life events can deeply affect mental well-being.

Symptoms vary depending on the illness

A. Depression: Feeling mentally broken, a sad mood most of the day, loss of interest and motivation, no longer enjoying activities once liked, realise life is meaningless, Mental restlessness, loss of sexual interest, sleep problems, loss of appetite, thoughts of suicide.

B. Anxiety: Constant restlessness, unknown fear and worry, fast heartbeat, shortness of breath, headache, burning or tingling sensation in hands and feet, dry mouth, upset stomach, frequent urge to urinate.

C. Psychosis: Delusions, strong belief in false ideas, such as thinking someone is trying to harm them when it is not true. Hallucinations- auditory, visual, or feeling things that do not exist, extreme anger.

D. Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

E. Mental disorders in children and adolescents: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, intellectual disability, depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, psychosis, substance addiction.

F. Mental disorders in old age: Alzheimer's dementia-memory loss and inability to perform daily tasks, depression, anxiety, psychosis.

G. Behavioural problems due to Epilepsy. If epilepsy remains uncontrolled for years, patients may develop depression, anxiety or psychosis.

H. Mental illness due to substance abuse. Long-term use of addictive substances disrupts brain chemicals and causes mental illness.

Symptoms include- shaking hands, sleeplessness, fear, confusion, seizures.

Common substances include alcohol, cannabis, heroin, brown sugar, dendrite and misuse of cough syrups or sleeping pills.

You may wonder why I am discussing medical science here. The reason is that many members of my own family suffered from mental illness, even though we all at some point of time in our lives suffer from these problems but we ignore them; something which I realised only after becoming a doctor. Due to a lack of awareness these illnesses were never recognised as medical conditions. It is treated as a stigma in our society and people simply live with them, some improve over interval, others adjusted silently.

My grandmother is suffering from dementia-memory loss due to old age related. My mother lost her mother at a young age and suffered emotionally. Later, losing her first child broke her mentally and she developed habit of soliloquy to which family members mockingly called her “mad,” without realising that she needed treatment and emotional support.

My uncle could not study because he worked as a helping hand to support the family. This caused deep sadness and insomnia and later he received treatment and improved. Similarly, my mother also needed treatment, but the family could not understand this. It is not only my family's problem but a problem of our society; we suffer but are hesitant to share fearing societal nonacceptance. Similar to other physical illnesses, it is also a general disorder; We usually take treatment seriously only when we feel pain, but silent diseases are often more dangerous-like barking dogs that seldom bite.

Another incident involved my aunt after marriage. She entered a large joint family with no experience of household work. She faced pressure, criticism and emotional stress. Slowly, she developed symptoms of mental illness but the family believed spirits possessed her and traditional rituals

were performed instead of medical treatment. Later, I realised that all those were symptoms of mental illness, not spiritual possession.

Final Message

Mental illness can affect anyone-me, you or anyone else. Treatment includes medicines, a doctor's guidance, family support and empathy. **Everyone deserves love, understanding and positivism to survive, someone they can trust and feel at peace with whether it is a mother, father, child, spouse, or loved one.** With awareness, compassion and proper treatment, mental illness can be managed and healed.

Pressure can do extraordinary things; it can be mental or physical. It can blast a massive bomb and also can turn coal into a diamond. It can also change people's minds, shape us from the inside, sometimes strengthening us, sometimes breaking us, can even change the government of a country. It helps in making an axe; with enough force, an axe can cut down trees. Wood buried deep underground for a long era produces coal or energy and can convert coal into diamond also. Electric power can also be generated by high-pressure water.

Nothing is purely excellent or worst; it all depends on our priorities and how we use it. We must know where to apply pressure, how much to apply and when not to apply it at all. Life flows more smoothly when you keep your mind free from pressure. You can sleep peacefully, laugh openly and even fly in your dreams. Some stretched food in our belly creates pressure to go out and when that pressure is released, it feels like heaven. Pressure is hell when misused and heaven when used wisely. Live each day as if it were the last day of your life and experience a stress-free life.

Perhaps too much of Everything is as Harmful as too Little

Once upon a time there was a land that lived in droughty due to a lack of rain. Its soil had cracked under the relentless sun and its people had long forgotten the feeling of coolness. The air burned, the trees stood tired, silent and every living being carried an unspoken prayer within, a prayer for rain. Day after day, the sky remained empty. Yet the deserts kept looking upward, as though hope itself lived among the clouds. Even the trees stretched their branches toward the sky of heaven, open hands waiting to receive mercy. Then one day the rain finally came. It arrived suddenly, without warning, touching the earth with a cool and soothing grace. The burning land breathed again. The weary minds of the people felt revived. What was on one occasion exhaustion turned into quiet joy. The drizzle did not merely wet the soil; it awakened romance within tired hearts. For a moment, life felt complete.

But the rain did not stop. It continued to fall... and fall... and fall comparable to cloudburst. What had once only been a blessing slowly turned into a menace. The gentle drops became restless torrents. Rivers overflowed, fields drowned and homes disappeared beneath rising waters. Mud replaced dry ground. Fear replaced relief. The same rain that had brought life now began to destroy it. Human lives were lost and animals vanished. The land that in the past prayed for rain now prayed for warmth. People looked to the sky again, this instance not for rain, but for sunlight. They slowly understood a quiet truth; **even kindness when excessive and overindulged, can be harmful.**

The winter season arrived soon after bringing a cold that did not merely chill the body but offered a moment of inner pleasure. In contrast, the summer clung desperately to warmth, refusing to let it go. It reminded people that comfort and suffering often live side by side. Through these changing seasons, another truth revealed itself. Happiness does not live in rain or sunshine. It lives only in the mind. Those who can

sense sorrow even in moments of joy begin to understand life deeply. And those who can still smile in sorrow, walk a strange path that leads either to freedom beyond life and death, or to losing themselves completely within its endless cycle. And so **one must learn to live not by waiting for perfect weather but by preparing one's heart for every season.**

The Ascetic Man from our Village: A Stress Free Life

Looking back on a simple man from our village, Ali's father whose name I do not even know, who lived an ordinary life, constantly chanting the name of God. He did not clearly understand what was virtuous or vicious. Born deaf, he could not hear anything, so he remained absorbed in his own thoughts and reflections. He would sit in the mosque and listen to religious teachings. Whether he truly understood them or not, no one could say. Yet he believed that whatever was being said was righteous and with that faith, he continued to sit and listen, even though he could not hear. While walking along the road, he rambles forward carefully, step by step, occasionally looking back. If he sensed a motor bike approaching, he would quickly step aside and move to the edge of the road, remaining alert and cautious. He does not know what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said, nor where political speeches filled with profound dialogue have been delivered. He cannot read or write, yet deep in his heart, he understands the presence of the Creator. When we see the evil in the world, sorrow fills our minds. Even if we try to ignore it, dark clouds slowly gather within us. To recognise ethical deeds and reject the unethical ones, one must use the inner eye, the conscience and the heart. Money and wealth have their value in life, but when even a part of the body fails, one truly understands the real value of life.

A Tribute to Angel Father: Our Family's Yudhishtira

Most of us are familiar with the **Mahabharata**-an epic whose very name evokes grandeur and vastness. It is not merely a tale, but a sweeping chronicle that encapsulates Indian civilisation; its literature, culture, politics, philosophy, social order, diplomacy and economy. To understand Indian thought in its fullness, one must pass through the corridors of it.

Just as that great epic begins on the banks of the **Ganga**, my story begins on the terrain of the **Brahmaputra**. My grandfather and my grandmother had five sons and two daughters. Even today, one can observe reflections of Mahabharata's characters in real life, even in sports, as in cricket, where Sachin Tendulkar is likened to Yudhishtira, Virender Sehwag to Bhima, Sourav Ganguly to Arjuna, Yuvraj Singh to Nakula and Mohammad Kaif to Sahadeva.

In our family, too, I observed the **Pandavas** re-imagined, though not as a doppelganger but in my imagination. My father, the eldest of the siblings, was an honest, veracious, calm, spiritual, piety and just man, respected by all in the village and often called upon to settle disputes as an arbitrator. He was, in every sense, **our Yudhishtira**.

My eldest uncle, Moinul Haque Prodhani, was stout, strong, disciplined, a teacher by profession and voracious, much alike the **Bhima**. Uncle Majibar was sharp, humorous, an eloquent speaker and served in the Indian Defence Forces which justify unparalleled archer- the **Arjun**. Uncle Munsur was hard-working, compassionate and a peacemaker in family affairs, loyal, mirroring the **Nakula**. The youngest, uncle Mozammel, was a BSc teacher, affectionate, with profound religious wisdom and fair to all, just similar to the **Sahadeva**.

In the early days, we were part of a large joint family. After moving to Telipara, it became difficult for my grandfather to shoulder the financial burden alone. Due to the period of hardship and to support the family as backbone, my father

abandoned his studies and began working in a timber company. The work was gruelling, especially for someone so young. The dense forests of Kokrajhar were rich with towering trees, which were bought cheaply, chopped down and sold by the owner of the factory. The logs were massive and usually required multiple hands to lift, but the company hired my father because they believed in his strength and dedication.

Though physically taxing, the job offered a steady income and my father was occasionally able to bring home leftover timber for household use and also prepared house with that. My grandmother would wake early, cook and pack his lunch with care. She adored my father, fully aware of his sacrifices. Eventually, he secured a job at the Agricultural University, a modest government post but the family's first steady source of income. Thankfully, the office was close to home.

He slept barely five hours a day and spent the rest in service to others. I saw him rise at 4 or 5 a.m., brushing his teeth with a twig, and heading to the mosque. He would pray, read the Quran and recite zikr, a meditative chant believed to cleanse the soul. By 5:30 a.m., he would return home to feed our ducks, chickens, cows and goats.

We always had a few cows for milk, and he prepared their feed by mixing salt, water and husk. We hired young boys to help with the animals and he treated them all with equal gentleness as such as family members. I look back on, how tenderly he spoke to the animals: **"Eat well, Don't quarrel," 'come-come" or "You look weak, haven't eaten enough?"** His voice always carried warmth and affection.

Our home resembled a small farm, clowder of cats, a couple of dogs, herd of cows and goats, flock of hens and ducks that my grandmother raised. She would walk barefoot under the scorching sun to fetch water for the livestock specially cows and goats for being head over heels for animals is just in her blood.

My father would plough the farmland surrounding our house before heading to the office. At 7:45 a.m. he would eat whatever prepared by the ladies and leave for work by 8 a.m. During the sowing season, he laboured alongside field workers, performing every task from weeding to harvesting, he never missed a single workday.

His responsibilities at the office included supervising all workers, drying grains, marketing the produce and storing quality seeds for the next crop cycle. Though he could have delegated, he chose to work with his own hands. On one occasion the office tractor driver went on a four-month leave, my father drove the tractor himself through waterlogged fields, despite having just learned to drive. When asked why he endured such hardship and laborious works, he simply said, "Its the rainy season, if we delay planting, the agriculture office will suffer huge losses."

His integrity earned him the trust of university scientists. In his break, he read newspapers specially sports and political, a habit that led to his crush for cricket, first through print, then the radio and eventually, *Doordarshan* in television. He watched every match with unwavering focus.

Every day by 12:30 p.m. he came home for lunch, performed his noon prayers, ate and returned to work by 1:30 p.m. After office hours, he would go straight to Telipara market, where we ran a small grocery shop. It opened at 4 p.m. and many of his office colleagues bought items on credit. The shop was always bustling, he often handed the bags of household items to returning villagers to carry our home. In those days, community spirit was strong, carrying someone's load for a mile was normal, and no one complained. My father returned home around 8 p.m., prayed, ate, saw news on television and went to sleep.

Sundays were no rest day. He would cycle to Gossaigaon town to purchase shop supplies, load some on carts and carry the rest himself. Sunday afternoons were reserved for fishing and I, his eager companion, would tag along to help. **Those**

moments of fishing and watching cricket on were the rare occasions we truly shared.

There was a river near our home, with rocks beneath a modest bridge. My father would cast nets there, dive deep, shift the rocks, stones and bring up large fishes. I cherished watching it, perhaps it was inherited from my maternal grandfather. My grandmother would jokingly ask, “Do you want to be a fisherman like your grandpa?”

My father was a mediator of village disputes and managed land divisions even among his maternal relatives despite being younger. While dividing property among his four brothers, he said, “Grab one share each, I will pick up whatever remains.” He stayed in the old ancestral house and helped each brother build their own house. Even though the joint family eventually split for practical reasons, there was never conflict, hail to his patient and just nature.

Beyond the home he maintained impeccable integrity, it seemed divine grace always accompanied him. Onetime, he was given excess salary money for the whole office at the bank due to miscalculation and he returned it without hesitation. Another instance while depositing funds in Dhubri, three counterfeit 500-rupee notes were discovered. The bank detained him and questioned him. He calmly explained that he had withdrawn the bundles from the Gossaigaon SBI bank without opening them. The bank called his office and the police, both vouched for his honesty, he was released immediately. Even though he held a modest position at the university however retired chief scientists and scientists promoted and posted as vice-chancellors in other universities often used to call him directly over the phone showing their concern.

He gave everything for the family and never ever thought of himself. I recall, overhearing one of my aunts said, **“Your father isn’t a man; he’s an angel.”** That sentence has stayed with me forever.

Indeed, he was our guardian angel, upholding the values of dharma, artha, kama and moksha, just alike Yudhishtira.

The Soul of the Soil: Secularism in our Blood

Secularism, I have often felt, is not a moral we acquired from textbooks, nor a doctrine memorized for examinations. It is something quieter and deeper, something that flows in our blood carried forward through lived moments and untold stories to history. One such story unfolded in a place called **Dharmasala**, not the one cradled in the hills of Himachal Pradesh, but in Dhubri, Assam. It was a season when fear walked openly through the streets and trust withdrew behind bolted doors; when communal violence had stripped identity down to a perilous label, a matter of life and death. Neighbors who earlier exchanged greetings across courtyards began to look at one another with guarded eyes. Familiarity gave way to suspicion; humanity seemed to stand on trial.

On one such tense afternoon three school teachers belonging to the Hindu community men who had spent, their lives shaping young minds with chalk-dusted hands and patient voices spotted themselves running for their lives. Pursued by an enraged mob they fled without direction guided only by instinct and desperation. With no sanctuary in sight they rushed into the nearest house they could find the home of my father's cousin-Mr. Hobibor Prodhani. Their refuge, however was brief. The horde crowd soon arrived, armed with swords and the reckless certainty that hatred often gaffes for righteousness. The air trembled with fury. It was then that my uncle stepped forward. He emerged from his home holding a sword, not as an instrument of attack but as a boundary that violence would not be permitted to cross. Planting himself firmly at the threshold, he stood between the mob and the terrified teachers. His voice calm yet unyielding, carried a resolve far sharper than the steel in his hand. He declared that anyone wishing to harm the men inside would first have to

kill him. It was not the weapon he held that halted them; it was the moral force of his conviction. He reminded them that the men they sought were teachers, builders of the very society whose name they now invoked in rage. He said, to strike them would be to wound not a community, but humanity itself.

Something shifted in that charged silence and anger faltered. One by one, the men stepped back. The mob retreated, leaving behind not bloodshed but an unexpected moment of grace in a time otherwise consumed by madness. The teachers survived because one man chose conscience over identity, humanity over division. In gratitude they later wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri, determined that the act should not vanish into anonymity. Eventually the story travelled beyond the district reaching the nation's ears. **My uncle was honored with the President's Award by the then President of India, K. R. Narayanan.**

When asked what he desired in return, he demanded for nothing, no land, no favor, no reward. He sought only blessings. For he believed that the truest recompense had already been granted in that silent victory where humanity stood firm against hate and did not yield. That day, secularism was not debated, it was lived.

Chapter 2

Our Village Team: The Beginning of a Dream

Time: "Between" 1994-2003,

"Nobody has seen form. It's a state of mind where you are confident and think very positively."

"A mistake can cost you millions, but a lesson learned can bring back billions." **M.S. Dhoni**

(Inspirational quote from Social Media)

The Bhomrabil Cricket Club (BCC): Rising Stars

Dhoni, the main character of my story was born in 1988 in a joint family in the remote village- **Serfanguri**, located in the Kokrajhar district of Assam. Back then, there were no mobile phones or the internet. Life was simple and childhood meant playing games and spending times with friends.

When my father brought home the first black and white television in our area, it became a big event. People came from nearby villages just to watch television at our home. Being the eldest son in the family, I was fortunate to receive many sports kits which are actually hand made and thanks to the television, I could gather friends around and build a small cricketing circle. At that stage, television was our coach. We learned everything, from batting stance to fielding positions, by watching cricket matches.

People often say today's generation is distracted by the internet and social media, but for me, my dreams began in those childhood days, inspired by the images and matches I

saw on that humble television set. Programs such as Shaktimaan, Alif Laila, Sri Krishna, Ramayana, Rangoli, Chitrahar and the news were popular. But cricket was what brought us together. Boys would gather at our place and when the electricity went out which was often due to power cut for long duration, we would head outside and play cricket.

Batting was always my favourite. Even when alone, I practised catching and bowling by throwing the ball against the wall of our house. My father also developed affection towards cricket and watched matches together each ball of every tournament. He crafted me my first bat with his own hands and brought me a ball. I still commemorate, discussing match summaries with friends like an commentator.

Over time, cricket became popular in our village. I had passion for all kinds of sports-football, volleyball, kabaddi, carom, chess but cricket held a special place. I used to observe my father and uncle playing chess under the big tree near our house. Within days just by watching, I learned how the king, rooks, bishops, knights, and pawns move. I quickly picked up the game and even started winning. I introduced chess to my friends at school too and many learned the carom from me. It was the period when we learned from one another without Google, YouTube or Wikipedia.

As I grew older I began practising cricket at the Serfanguri playground with senior players. I was naturally tremendous at fielding and since there was no regular wicketkeeper, they encouraged me to grab up the role. One of the most visionary and dynamic players I met there was Bhutto. He organised local tournaments and took cricket seriously.

I was still a young boy, but I played as a wicketkeeper and defensive batsman. Bhutto often said, **“You just hold the front foot defence from one side, I will make the runs from the other.”** That trust helped me strengthen my defensive skills. There was no LBW rule at that time so to minimise the pain of fastballs blasting the thighs, he wore a

lungi folded inside and track pants on top, our own village version of protective gear as thigh guard.

Sadly in 2004, Bhutto passed away accidentally after being **bitten by a snake**. Due to lack of awareness and cultural belief he was treated at home with the help of ojhas-traditional healers which led to fatality. I still jog the memory of his last words just before unconscious, “I am seeing everything double”- binocular diplopia, a neurological manifestation of snake venom. His untimely death was a huge loss for our village cricket community. He was energetic, dedicated and passionate about the cricket.

We also lost Mujeeb, a brilliant all-rounder from Dhubri. He **died suffering malaria** which was often common in those days in Assam specially in Kokrajhar district. He stayed in our village for a few months to study and joined our team. His performances were unforgettable. A funny and cheerful guy, he brought joy to our match. He was so mischievous that onetime after a match while bathing in the river, he ran off with one of our friends' clothes, leaving him to run home wearing only his briefs.

Another moment, a player from near by village named Abdul, bragging about his swimming skills, joined us for a river swim. Wearing a lungi folded similar to Bhutto's method, he confidently swam with us and lost his lungi midway in the river and got so tired that he couldn't swim back. It was only when one of us lent him shorts underwater he could come up. These memories, though hilarious, taught us an important message- **overconfidence often leads to downfall whether in life or in cricket**. Cricket to us wasn't just a game, it was our life. It taught us about teamwork, decision-making, resilience, patience, consistency, tireless and putting one's shoulder to the wheel.

Discovering our Teams Ashish Nehra

One memorable match was against the Telipara cricket team. I invited a boy named Ashish Nehra- a pet name given to him because of his bowling style from Bhomrabil village to play for us. That day, he took 7 wickets in a low-scoring match and helped us win. I played a defensive inning. My father was so impressed, he asked about Ashish's full name. I told him, "Aman Ch. Das, son of Mr. N. Ch. Das from Bhomrabil." I still have a vivid memory of that contest. From that day on, we called him our own Ashish Nehra. I learned something valuable that day. **The world is full of players, but it only remembers game-changers.**

The Birth of the Team: The Collective Force

I convinced my father for my admission in Bhomrabil M.E. School, which was quite far away, after passing L.P. School from my village. The secret reason was to gather more players as there was shortage of players around my village. As a reward for passing L.P. School, uncle Munsur gifted me a red Hero bicycle. It was small, but precious like a red bullet. I learned to ride looking at the front wheel instead of far ahead and felt off after 200 meters. **That fall taught me a experience, to keep going look ahead and not just down.** Soon I was riding everywhere, free as a bird.

The playground at Bhomrabil M.E. School already had a cricket culture inspired by India's 1987 World Cup win. Seniors such as Muzzamel uncle, Biplob, Zakir, Zianur, Rofiquel, Chandan and Jatun had brought in proper cricket equipment's from nearby towns. But we, the younger boys, were not allowed to bat and only field. Slowly, the older players lost matches, became discouraged and as family and study pressures grew, they began to drift away.

We the younger generation stepped in with a few senior players and a bunch of juniors. We formed a new team and started facing senior teams, surprisingly, we gave them a

tough fight. That gave us the motivation and courage to practice rigorously. I was promoted to the position of wicketkeeper because of my fearless dives and quick reflexes. Looking back, **that was the beginning of my own “Dhoni phase.”**

Players like Aman, Nilup, Mithun and Dipon joined us early on. As we entered to class 8, more friends from nearby M.E. Schools came to Bhomrabail H.E. School. Though the team was called the Bhomrabail Cricket Team, it had players from various villages. We weren't united by geography but by our passion for the cricket and our friendship. We didn't care about religion, caste, or language, whether we were **Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Bengali, Bodo, Deshi or Santali**, we were one team, one dream.

It wasn't an easy task to bring together 15 to 20 boys, each with different responsibilities at home, to practice as a cricket team. Most of the parents were against cricket, often prophesying that **“Playing cricket won't put rice on your plate or secure a job for you. You need to learn practical skills, work skills, and business skills.”** Many families had farms, shops, or other businesses to run, and parents were happier if their sons helped with the household work rather than going out to play.

But Ashish Nehra and I had a dream of building our cricket team and we worked tirelessly to change the mindset of our teammates. We started preparing the team and as **I look back, I see the 2011 Indian World Cup team reflected in our squad.** Our team's players by coincidence resembled and reflected the personalities of those players. Here's a breakdown of how our team was structured.

The Village Eleven: Under the Same Sky

Subhrata Shil: The most humorous and aggressive player on our team, he liked to open the batting. He always declared, “I will play attacking cricket!” He would often hit three or four

boundaries in a row, usually fours, but would get out soon after, laughing it off as if he had done his job. Whether we won or lost, he never stressed. He was the Virender Schwag of our team.

Haradhan Debnath: A calm and composed left-hand batsman. He would start slow but always looked to accelerate as soon as he got settled. He was great at rotating the strike and enjoyed flicking the leg side. He was a strong partner at the crease, and we made many successful partnerships, especially in crucial matches. He was the Gautam Gambhir of our team.

Rezaul Hoque: Rezaul was an all-rounder, with a wide range of shots while batting and the ability to bowl crucial wickets at key moments. He was also an excellent fielder, particularly on the off-side. His temperament was such as Yuvraj Singh's. Tragically, Rezaul's father passed away due to throat cancer, similar to how Yuvraj Singh fought his battle. Rezaul had to adopt into family responsibilities in very young age, leaving cricket behind.

Nilup Debnath: He was the most enthusiastic and serious player on our team. He took fielding seriously and take pleasure in sledging opponents with funny remarks. He also had a loud appeal whenever he bowled and at some points got into arguments with the umpire if a decision didn't go his way. We had to calm him down a few instances. He was aggressive with his bowling, and we often joked that he had a "worm on his head" due to his temper. Nilup was the Sreesanth of our team, a powerhouse of energy and commitment.

Dipon Debnath: The most consistent bowler of our team, he was known for his straightforward, wicket-to-wicket bowling style. He often took early wickets and create it difficult for opponents to settle. He was our Munaf Patel, a bowler who could keep the batsmen in check with accuracy and discipline. While Dipon wasn't known for his humour, he would always smile with joy when he took a wicket.

Rofiqul Islam: The tallest player on our team, he had a calm demeanour but was an excellent decision-maker when needed. He bowled fast, coming in from a distance, and had a strong presence on the field, especially at long-on. He wasn't known for taking many wickets, but his six-striking ability was legendary and his fielding was top-notch. He was our Zaheer Khan.

Aman Ch. Das: He was the Ashish Nehra of our team. He was a fast bowler with great variations, swinging the ball both ways and using short balls and bouncers effectively. However, he was often too excited, leading to wide eyes, which I had to calm him down for. Aman wasn't a great fielder, often missing catches, but his leadership, responsibility, and decision-making skills molded him a key player. Despite not being the best batsman, he improved his playing and played a crucial role in the team's success.

N. I. Prodhani: As I have already mentioned, I was the MS Dhoni of the team, a wicketkeeper-batsman and the backbone of the batting order. I played a crucial role in behind-the-stumps communication, ensuring field placements were correct and keeping the team motivated. In difficult situations, I stayed calm, rotated the strike and hit big sixes when required. My role in the team was sagacious, a mix of leadership and skill, much comparable to Dhoni in the 2011 World Cup, in my imagination.

Mithun Devnath: He was the best-swiping batsman of our team, akin to Yusuf Pathan. He preferred flicking balls to the leg side but was also capable of clearing the offside boundaries. His ability to hit the ball hard formed him an exciting player to watch.

Bupul Devnath: Our Harbhajan Singh, was a bowler who could also contribute with the bat if needed. While he didn't shine in big matches, he was a permanent part of our team and always ready to contribute.

Monaj Saha: He was a reliable player who could bat at the lower order and bowl when required. He was the R. Ashwin of our team, a useful all-rounder.

There were also other players such as Bhushan, Akhtar, Pradeep, Dewani, Amit, Narzary, Marmu, Mostafa, Chandan and Biplab, all contributing to our team's success in different ways. **While we didn't have players alike Sachin Tendulkar or Virat Kohli,** we made up for it with our collective spirit and determination. We couldn't win big tournaments due to the lack of a solid top-order batsman, but in bilateral series, we were dominant.

Bhomrabil: The Playground of Memories

The Bhomrabil Playground was the best ground in our area. It was large, with a long boundary, and we took great care in preparing the pitch. Nehra and I took the lead and with the help of a few players and some non-playing members Azizul etc., we constructed the pitch ourselves, using soil from the paddy field and bricks to strengthen the batting area. The ground, surrounded by a school and market, became a hub for cricket in our village. We had a steady audience who cheered us on during matches namely Akher, Jatan, Zakkir and Aminur Sir.

Before the First Ball: Pre-Match Gatherings

Before each match, I would gather the players, sometimes riding bicycles through the village to bring everyone together. We had no mobile phones so the only way to inform players was by riding to their homes. It was challenging but we did it with passion. We also used to throw stones on the tin roof of their houses when the competition was about to start to signal players such as Nilup i.e. our Shreesanth so that he could silently sneak out of his parents vicinity.

The Secret of Success: Preparation and Practice

Our preparation wasn't just limited to field practices. We discussed batting and bowling lineups, field placements, and strategies before each match. We had fixed positions for each player based on their strengths. For example, I would always be behind the stumps as a wicketkeeper, while Zaheer Khan and Sreesanth were assigned long-on and short positions respectively.

Our practice sessions were held in the evening until darkness created it difficult to see the ball. Despite not having a coach or a net for practice we worked intensively learning from the players we saw on television. We had drills for batting, bowling, fielding, and even special exercises to improve our offside driving abilities. It wasn't perfect, but we were determined to give our best.

Beyond the Boundary: Post-match Gatherings

After each match, win or lose, we would gather on the field, lie on the grass and discussing about the oversight of our strategy. We would joke, analyse our performances and chit-chat about future matches. Friends and supporters would bring us cold drinks and snacks, we would discuss strategies for the next match. This was our journey of team work, passion and commitment for cricket. Though we didn't have the financial or material resources, we had the dream and that dream kept us going just alike the 2011 World Cup team.

Chapter 3

Our Childhood Rivals: The Opponent Teams

Time Between 1994-2003,

"Appreciate everything in life. Play hard, study hard, listen to your parents, give love and respect to the elders and the ones younger than you, and have a lot of fun."

"If there is commitment, that's a victory for me." "It's important to learn and not repeat the same mistakes. What's done is done." M.S. Dhoni (Inspirational quotes from Social Media)

The Enemy inside the Cricket Crease

Our village cricket team had several rival teams from nearby villages and every match against them was full of excitement and pride. These teams challenged us with strong batting and fast bowling, making each game feel like a final. Sometimes we won and celebrated with joy and sometimes we lost and learned valuable lessons. Those rivals pushed us to practice harder and made our childhood cricket journey unforgettable

As I mentioned earlier, we played many matches against teams from villages like **Palashguri, Telipara, Oxyguri, Haraputa, Goladangi, Dawaguri, Shapkata, Srirampur, Padmabil, Gossaigaon, Simultapu, Hawriyapet, Damrapara and Barobisha**. Looking back at the environment we grew up in, the different playing styles and our match experiences it struck me that we in our own way

lived through the 2011 ODI World Cup between 1994 and 2004. We resembled Team India, with Palashguri acting comparable to Pakistan, Telipara alike Sri Lanka, Padmabil as Australia and so on. Each opposing team had characters that reminded me of international teams. Among all our opponents, we faced Palashguri the most and we won most of the matches. However they never gave up easily, always challenging us. We also played many matches against Telipara, Oxyguri and Padmabil. Let me tell you bit about Palashguri (the Pakistan team) and Telipara (the Sri Lanka team) .

Palashguri: A Childhood Rivalry Called the “Pakistan Team”

The Palashguri team was like the Pakistan team from the 2011 ODI World Cup. We faced them almost every Sunday. They were fighters, always pushed hardcore to win but they could never quite beat us. Despite losing many games they never stopped playing against us. Here's a brief overview of their team.

Manzur Ilahi: He was as Mohammad Hafeez of their team. A versatile player who could bat and bowl well, a classy batsman with great shot-making ability.

Mafizur Rahman: Similar to Wahab Riaz, he bowled aggressive short balls and bounced the ball in his unique round-the-wicket style. He also went for slamming sixes when needed.

Selim Ahmed: The fighter of the team, comparable to Shoaib Malik. He could bat and bowl equally well, always adding pressure on the opponent with his all-round skills.

Nashir Sk: A left-arm fast bowler, alike Sohail Tanvir, known for bowling yorkers and bouncers. He could also hit the ball hard when required.

Moidul Alom: A tall, fast bowler, much alike Shoaib Akhtar. He was frightening to face because of his height and pace.

Aynal Hoque: The wicketkeeper, batsman, comparable to Kamran Akmal, who opened the batting for them and played an aggressive cricket.

Zianur Rahman: A senior player who batted at No. 7 and could also bowl at crucial situations, alike Abdur Razzaq.

Moksadul Hazarika: A powerful batsman who was known for hitting huge sixes. He was the Shahid Afridi of their team.

Hafizur Rahman: The captain-like figure, though he was more of a defensive batsman who rotated the strike. He resembled Misbah-ul-Haq.

Zahid Iqbal: A technically sound batsman, similar to Younis Khan.

Jubaidur: A fighter with the bat, such as Umar Akmal.

Telipara – The Sri Lanka Team of My Childhood

When I think about the players of Telipara, I can only recall the 2011 Sri Lanka team. Here's a brief description of their players:

Abdul Munnaf: My cousin who played as an opener for Telipara. He resembled Kumar Sangakkara in his elegant stroke play.

Biju: The most dangerous batsman representing Tilakratna Dilshan, who could hit big sixes and also bowl when needed.

Raju: A superb batsman but often fall short to score big, much alike Chamara Kapugedera.

Mantu Shaw: The best all-rounder such as Angelo Mathews, who could contribute with both bat and ball.

Tinku: Another all-rounder much alike Tishara Perera.

Ranjan: The team's fast bowler who was a lot like Lasith Malinga, known for his pace and deadly yorkers.

Tarachan: The senior player who bowled with a unique style much similar to Muttiah Muralitharan.

Bijoy Saha: The Nuwan Kulasekara of their team, a bowler who focused on fast deliveries.

Bittu Kar: Much comparable to Ajantha Mendis, he could bowl tricky deliveries.

Rattan Debnath: A classical batsman such as Mahela Jayawardena, with a solid technique.

Zahangir Alom: A solid batsman resembling Upul Tharanga.

Tales from the Telipara Playground

Telipara had two playgrounds, one large and distant from the market and another smaller one closer to the market. The leg-side was flat while the on-side had a large wall and the off-side had a river that often had water. The long side was bordered by a highway and a bridge. Many spectators gathered on the bridge and along the highway to watch the matches. My father, Sayed tailor uncle, Amol and Mona uncle were our regular supporters. Many boys would climb onto the boundary wall of the RARS office to savor the competition of the match. The on-side boundary was short so smacking the ball over the wall was always a thrill especially when my father and uncle were watching. Our teammate Gautam Gambhir i.e. Haradhan also enjoyed playing on this ground, and he appreciated making partnerships with me swiping balls towards the river. Playing cricket taught us many eye-openers about friendship, trust and patience during batting.

The Moments that Made our Friendship

Oxyguri was comparable to the Australian team in our era. They had players with excellent teamwork and we played many tough matches against them often losing. In one contest, I hit five consecutive cover drives but still lost. In another, I hit three sixes in a row against one baller, a moment I will never forget. After the match, they praised me for my shots, showing the true spirit of the game.

I also recall a match against Telipara at Bilpar playground, where I played for the Serfanguri team as a guest. We were chasing a big target, and after losing seven wickets, I managed to steer the team to victory with one wicket to spare. My teammates lifted me on their shoulders in celebration, a spell I will always cherish.

We also had many funny codes during matches to keep our minds active. “Hash marka” (duck) meant getting out without scoring, and “Padumphul” (lotus flower) referred to an easy catch.

Despite having 15 to 20 players in our team, four of us—Ashish Nehra (Aman), Yuvraj Singh (Rezaul), Zaheer Khan (Rofiquel) and Dhoni (Myself) were particularly close. We were classmates at Bhomrabil H.E. School, a non-government school run by selfless teachers. We spent as much spell playing cricket as we did studying, though the balance shifted more toward studies as we entered class 8. Our teachers, such as Mozammel, Aminur, Hamid, Debnath Sir and my uncle Moinul, had a significant role in shaping our mindset toward education. We would often discuss cricket between classes or play chess during breaks.

The Threads of Trust: In the Fabric of Friends

One day, we decided to attend a felicitation program at Goladangi School for Zahid Iqbal, who had ranked in the HSLC SEBA board exams. We cycled there, but on the way, the lower portion of my long pants got torn accidentally. Embarrassed, I tried to return home but Nehra insisted to go together. We looked at a tailor in Goladangi who stitched my pants and we attended the program, learning a lot about Zahid’s strategical work. He was also a player from Palashguri cricket team. This incident reminded me of the value of friendship and support.

The Constructive Power of Positive Discipline.

Our school, Bhomrabail H.E. School, provided a solid educational environment with dedicated teachers. Although they didn't receive a salary such as government teachers, they taught with great devotion. On one occasion someone from our class eve-teased saying “**going with gear**” to the girls from junior batch while they were passing by our classroom. Bhuyan Sir, our Assamese teacher, was particularly funny, but the moments he became furious with us for using inappropriate language. He punished us with a long cane, which felt unjust at the stage of life, but looking back, I understand it was for our own constructiveness, to maintain discipline and respect on the campus. **The positive impact of encouraging and supportive discipline is the prime need of educational institutions.**

Let the Cat out of the Bag

Some instances we did things in secret such as going to the cinema, which our parents disapproved of. We sneaked into cinema halls in Gossaigaon and Barobisha, West Bengal, watching action movies such as Shastra featuring Sunil Shetty. On one occasion a man at the cinema let us in without tickets 30minutes before at previous screened movie would end. We were happy to get such offer among the huge crowd outside the hall for next movie. We were asked to sit on both sides of him, but later we realized that he had touched our private parts inappropriately, probably was a pervert. I pushed his hand away, and also later Aman said, he did the same thing with him as well. We laughed it off, but decided not to let the cat out of the bag. This incident gave us an important warning that hiding things from family or **doing wrong things can lead to trouble but the truth is always the best way to live.**

These moments of friendship, mischief and cricket created a bond that lasted through the years. The memories of these experiences, the lessons we learned and the support we gave each other continue to shape who we are today. **We should have at least one person behind us in life, someone we trust deeply, with whom we can share everything and truly spill the beans without fear.**

Chapter 4

Hostel Life: A New Chapter at GACH, Guwahati

TIME: Between 2007-2013,

*“Take risks. If you win, you will be happy.
If you lose, you will be wise.”* **Hardik Pandya**

“If you want to learn batting, bat with M.S. Dhoni.”
Ravindra Jadeja (Inspirational quote from Social Media)

The Path That Shaped Me: Echoes of My Journey

Hostel Diaries: At GACH, Guwahati

I was a boy who hitherto hated bitter gourd but relished prawns and milk tea. I got a kick out of riding bikes at full speed and waking up early in the morning. However with passing age, my tastes changed. I now appreciate bitter gourd and other healthy foods, even black and green tea. But prawn fish? I developed an allergy to it and perceive unpleasant sensation in the mouth. I no longer ride my bike recklessly either, having learned the consequences of high-speed rides.

When I was young, my family produced organic vegetables and whenever I visited relatives, my father would pack me with some of the vegetables to carry along as a gesture of love. At the point, I witnessed it embarrassing and awkward. On one occasion, I secretly dropped the vegetables at a shop on my way and visited my relative without them feeling relieved. But cycle changes and now, as a doctor living away from home at a medical campus, I cherish those organic vegetables.

Now a days I bring that to my residence or even to my father-in-law's home without hesitation. Life and preferences evolve teaching us important takeaway.

Life progresses in stages and change is inevitable. Just alike a caterpillar eventually metamorphoses into a butterfly and soars freely, I too transformed. At the beginning of his career, M.S. Dhoni was known for his aggressive batting and long hair. Then he adapted becoming a more responsible, defensive batsman while retaining his ability to hit big sixes when needed and he also shortened his hair. **This adaptability to change is essential for survival in the competitive world.** Players like VVS Laxman and Rahul Dravid struggled to adapt to the fast-paced nature of T20 cricket and had to retire. On the other hand, M.S. Dhoni thrived due to his remarkable versatility, including his cool and calm demeanour, hard-hitting ability, quick running and exceptional wicket keeping skills. These qualities helped him to shape the most successful captain of the Indian cricket team in all format. What stood out most was his decision-making ability in critical moments, a quality that truly set him apart.

My life took a major turn when I shifted to Guwahati in 2007 to pursue my medical studies. It marked the beginning of a new chapter, new hostel, new people, new environment, new experiences.

The first day I arrived at **Dr J.C.B. Boys Hostel No. 1**, located in Sundarbori, Jalukbaril, Guwahati, was **September 24, 2007**. The hostel, situated on **Tiger Hill**, was surrounded by trees and a cool pleasant atmosphere. As I stepped into Room No. 7, I saw a white coat hanging next to the bed. I felt a rush of excitement, this was the coat I had always dreamed

of wearing. It felt as a welcoming sign, a step closer to my dream of becoming a doctor.

As a child I had many dreams-becoming a cricketer, a teacher, an army officer, a naval officer, a pilot, a political leader, a doctor or a scientist. But I had never imagined of becoming a writer. Yet, that moment of seeing the white coat, I started envisioning myself as a doctor, wearing a white coat, stethoscope on my shoulder or performing surgeries in a hospital. At that moment I felt deeply connected to my goal.

Later two seniors approached me, asked for my name and postal address, ensuring I kept in mind it correctly. I told them my name was N I Prodhani, and I provided my address, Serfanguri No. 2 near the RARS office, Gossaigaon. One of them then said, "Why didn't you mention your father's name? Without your father's name, you don't have an identity." I hesitated but responded, "Moshior Rahman Prodhani." They laughed and said, "**Learn to speak with respect to elders**". You'll be asked these things repeatedly and you need to learn how to answer them in pure Assamese."

They asked about my hobbies and I mentioned cricket, movies, and reading books. One of the senior questioned, "Did you watch '*Pupu*'(porn)?" I didn't understand and they burst into laughter. I quickly asked, "What's your name, elder brother?" He replied, "I am Munna Ali." He then joked, asking how many slaps I could endure. I froze, intimidated by his 6'2" frame and remained silent with my head down. "If you can bear 100-200 slaps, you might survive here," he said. I simply replied, "I'll stay here no matter what."

"Fantastic," he said. "Move your luggage to **Room No. 23**. From today on you are going to be my roommate." I was thrilled, as he was the tallest and most intimidating guy in the

hostel, nicknamed "**King Kong**." I knew having him as a roommate would help me navigate hostel life more easily.

That was the beginning of my journey in Dr J.C.B. Boys Hostel No. 1, Room No. 23, at the Government Ayurvedic College & Hospital, Guwahati.

Day 2

The following morning, a new boy, **Ishaan**, arrived with his luggage. The seniors ordered him to walk two rounds around the hostel carrying his bag and baggage, much to the amusement of everyone. Soon after, two more boys, **Chanchal Kalita** and **Fardeen Ahmed**, arrived and were subjected to the same treatment. I was fortunate to have arrived a day early, which allowed me to avoid the bale procession.

That evening, the seniors summoned all of us to the dining hall. We thought it might be the beginning of our ragging, and we were terrified. But when we entered, the seniors instructed us to slap each other's faces so firm that the windows of the room would vibrate. Whoever slapped weakly would get a much solid slap from them. After that, they laid out the hostel's rules and regulations. We had to keep our hair short, dress in formal shirts and pants but not allowed jeans, belts, or watches till freshmen, bathe before 5:30 a.m., clean-shave daily, and pray together twice at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. We were also expected to run errands, participate in morning and evening activities, and maintain strict discipline. Any breach of these rules would lead to collective punishment.

We left the dining hall that evening with swollen faces and aching jaws, but we had no choice but to adapt.

Day 3

The next day, we woke up at 5 a.m., completed our morning routines, and began working smartly. We went around the hostel collecting the addresses of all the seniors, which helped us to get acquainted with them. During this stages of life, I learned a valuable experience in humility. One senior slapped me because I missed the mark to greet him properly when our eyes met. I didn't retaliate but apologised. This incident taught me the importance of respect and humility, especially in a new environment.

That evening, a senior, Bimal Kalita, asked us to massage his injured leg. We gritted our teeth and did it, knowing that it was part of our learning process. We hated it at that moments, but later realised that such tasks were important in erasing any egos we had. As doctors, we would soon face far more challenging situations without hesitation, whether dealing with patients in pain or handling wounds. It was then that I understood the value of these early experiences in shaping us.

After day 4

By the fourth day, Sanjay Pegu, a senior who got a kick out of cricket, invited us to play every morning from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. He said it would help us practice cricket and give us a break from ragging. I was thrilled. It took pleasure in bowling and batting, though my primary role was wicket-keeping. My bowling were aggressive, with variation as a yorker and bouncer and the seniors viewed it difficult to face. This led to a mutual respect for my cricket skills, and over time, the ragging lessened as we became friendly with our seniors.

The hostel cricket team had several skilled players, including Joy Sarma, Sanjay Pegu, Kamal Sarma, Rajib Singh Teron,

Rofi Zaman and others. Playing cricket together helped forge strong friendships. Through sports, we learned to appreciate each other's abilities, support each other and most importantly, learn from each other's mistakes.

Suddenly, we started to detect a deep sense of belonging to our hostel and even toward the seniors. One day, a senior named Niloy Dey explained that, as future doctors we must be comfortable with the human body and its vulnerabilities. He encouraged us to exhibit our private parts to check for any diseases or deformity, which led to a rather awkward but enlightening experience.

Looking back, I realise that ragging, while harsh helped us grow into professionals. It taught us discipline, teamwork and respect, lessons we would carry with us for the rest of our lives. Though we initially resented our seniors, we came to understand the value of what they did for us.

Years later, I met one of those seniors at a market. He was about to get married, and we had a wonderful conversation over tea. Ragging, it seemed had strengthened our bonds rather than harming us. In hindsight, it was a necessary rite of passage, one that shaped us into the professionals we had transformed. But physical and mental harassment in the name of ragging is not encouraging.

As we became familiar with our individual personalities during various hostel activities, we were all given nicknames. Almost every border had one, as I mentioned before. My roommate, for instance was known as **"King Kong"** due to his large build. Khagesh earned the nickname **"Pig"** because of his fondness for pork and his rather hefty physique. Dipak was dubbed the **"White Fox"** for his sharp, intelligent mind. Homen was affectionately called **"Dentist"** because of his

prominent incisor teeth. Teron was known as “Raka” as he was quite active in all sort of sports.

Each of us had our own quirky nickname. For example, C.K. was called "**Supper** Mokkel" for his tendency to make silly mistakes. At one time during a discussion about masturbation, he confused it with a type of high-quality besan- gram flour sighted in the market. Ishaan, with his cautious, head-out-of-the-door style of peering to see if any senior was around, was given the nickname "**Tortoise.**" Momin, known for wearing a lungi and speaking with authority, was called "Chacha," which means "uncle."

It was fascinating how these nicknames helped us bond and sometimes even served as a means of correcting bad habits or addressing disharmony among us. Many of these activities had a positive impact on our lives and we often realised their true value the moments we left the hostel.

During our ragging period some seniors took special care of us. Senior Homan Nath, who worked at the Guwahati University Hospital and would sometimes carry a couple of us along with him. We would stay at the hospital, observe patients and in return be spared from ragging. This gesture was not only educational but also brought us relief from the harsh treatment we were facing.

Sanjay Pegu would often escorted us to play cricket ensuring that others wouldn't find us for ragging during those stages. Nikhil Shyam, one of the senior borders always shielded us from mental torture and became our protector.

The final 10 days before Freshman Day were particularly intense for us. These days were a test of our ability to become an all-rounders in every activity. We were preparing for a cultural night, a freshman event and a farewell ceremony but

our main goal was to impress the teachers and the girls of the college. These days we have to participate in every activity from cleaning the hostel to playing various sports, writing articles, preparing a drama and decorating the hostel.

We were involved in everything, cleaning the floors, washing the windows, decorating the garden, painting the walls and even designing the hostel gate with a theme, which was an iconic representation of our hostel. We gathered materials from the forest behind the hostel, collected bamboo and long grass and brought them back to make the gate. It was our task to turn everything into a beautiful, creative masterpiece, with each of us taking on roles comparable to mechanics, architects, carpenters, cleaners, gardeners, artists and writers.

One of the most exciting and fulfilling tasks was preparing the gate. After we finalised its design—a *chang ghar* inspired by Assamese culture, we worked tirelessly gathering materials, setting up the structure and decorating it. From the top of the Tiger Hill behind our hostel, we looked down and admired the college campus. It was a beautiful sight. Throughout this period, we learned the value of teamwork, creativity and dedication. The seniors, who came from different backgrounds, brought unique ideas to the table and we learned a lot from them.

On the day of the freshman and farewell ceremony, we were excited to finally receive our official welcome. We dressed in white shirts and black pants, looking sharp. Our principal, O.P. Gupta sir, inaugurated the event, and a special guest, poet Nilim Kumar, who was an ex-student of our hostel, shared his experiences. He read some of his poems, and I kept in mind being deeply inspired by his words. His magniloquent speech impressed the crowds. Some of the poems, such as "Nimakh" (salt) and "Rad" (sunlight),

resonated with me deeply. One of the ex-boarder Manish, narrated a poem, “Oi sowali, abar bhal pai saba neki?” It means, “Hello girl, will you love me once?”. We loved the poem very much. The way he narrated it in a loud voice really touched our minds. The lecture from the ex-boarders about the funny hostel events of the past also made us laugh. That day, I felt a new sense of pride in our hostel community and a deep connection with everyone.

During the cultural night, we performed a drama about childbirth, which we had prepared during the hostel week. I played the role of a pregnant woman, and Ishaan, with his smaller stature, played the husband. Fardeen was the doctor and Chanchal played the role of a nurse. We had everyone in fits of laughter. This was an example of how at the hostel you could try your hand at anything from acting to cleaning to carpentry. It was a era of discovery and learning.

One of our talented senior boarder, Shyam chose the name “Progyan” for our wall magazine-a Sanskrit word meaning “supreme wisdom.” At first it seemed simply a beautiful and meaningful name, but there was a quiet story behind it. With gentle cleverness, he had shaped the name in a way that subtly reflected the name of one of his close friends, preserving their friendship in a lasting form. Soon the name proved to be perfectly chosen. Filled with poems, essays, drawings, and ideas from enthusiastic young minds, the wall magazine truly became a small treasure of knowledge for our hostel. Every boarder accepted the name with pride, and “Progyan” gradually turned into a symbol of our creativity, learning and shared memories.

The quarrels and conflicts in the hostel though inevitable were part of the overall learning experience. I flash back on

one incident where, during a picnic, one of the seniors slapped a junior for not dancing. This led to a small conflict, but the situation was eventually resolved by our sub-warden. It was a experience in conflict resolution and standing up for what is right.

Another challenge we faced involved local boys who often gathered near our hostel, drinking alcohol and causing trouble. After multiple warnings, we decided to take action and caught them with the help of the police. The whole experience taught us the importance of unity and standing up against injustice.

Throughout my college years, I experimented with different aspects of my life, including writing. I contributed articles to nearly every magazine published during my graduation time. I also became the Carom champion in my first year. The competition was fierce especially against my seniors but I managed to win through concentration and determination. The bond I shared with my hostel mates transcended regional differences. We had students from all over India from Assam to Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and beyond. We came from different cultures, with different food habits but we were united as one. Whether it was playing cricket or supporting each other through tough times, we were all brothers.

Hostel life was full of funny incidents too. For instance, when our principal sir jokingly told us to catch and eat the goat that had been grazing our garden plants and flowers, we took him literally. We captured the goat and tasted mutton curry together. It was a quirky yet unifying experience that showed how we were a family, ready to face any situation together.

As for my nickname, I enjoyed experimenting with different activities. One instance during a poem recitation competition,

a judge compared me to the famous Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam and it was a huge honour for me. Later, when I decided to try solo dancing, I earned the nickname "prem ki naiya" (Sailor of Love-ship) after my hilarious performance. From that day on my dance was lovingly called the "**Nazrul dance**," and my classmates and hostel mates would cheer me on every moment I danced.

The Silent Victim Strikes Back: Revenge of Ragging

The first days of medical college were not easy. Apart from the pressure of studies, we had to face another tradition of ragging. Whenever there was a gap between our classes, seniors would suddenly appear in the classroom such as strict inspectors. We had to sing, dance, or perform funny acts while they questioned us endlessly. We stood there quietly, trying to hide our fear and embarrassment. In our first classroom there stood a human skeleton, hanging silently in the corner. One day the seniors ordered each of us to kiss it, one by one. We hesitated, feeling awkward and uneasy, but as medical students we finally obeyed their command. That skeleton became a silent witness to our humiliation. Sometimes the ragging went too far. A few seniors even slapped juniors without any reason. Among them was a senior named Dr. Dev. Sarma. One day he slapped me hard. The sudden sting on my cheek burned with pain but I swallowed my anger and remained silent, as a junior I felt powerless.

A few days later, I saw him come to stay in our hostel and park his bike inside the campus. That night, when the hostel was wrapped in deep silence and everyone was asleep, a strange thought of revenge crept into my mind. At around two in the morning, I quietly walked out and punctured both the tyres of his bike. The next morning, I watched him pushing the bike on foot towards the mechanic. Inside me, there was a small sense of satisfaction.

But that feeling did not last long. Later I realized that revenge was not the right path. I could have complained to the principal instead. Ragging should never cross the limits of dignity. It should guide juniors, help them learn discipline, and build friendship, not cause pain or humiliation. That small incident taught me a quiet message; **anger may bring momentary satisfaction, but wisdom lies in choosing the right way. Revenge born of anger never solves a problem; it only deepens the wound.**

We were four classmates in that hostel, myself, Chanchal, Fardeen, Ishaan. Later Fardeen and Ishaan changed their direction of career from Ayurvedic medical Science to Modern medical science and presently Fardeen working as an Orthopedics Surgeon under Government hospital and Ishaan also working as Medicine specialist in a reputed hospital in Guwahati. Chanchal working in a Government hospital as senior medical officer. This is the essence of hostel life; **a transformation time of self-discovery, teamwork and unforgettable memories** that's why the annual function of this hostel is known as **"Metamorphosis"**. It was **a home away from home** where we grew, made mistakes and formed bonds that would last a lifetime. At the college graduation farewell I recited a self-composed poem.....

First steps at Jalukbari

That was my first step at Jalukbari.

*Beneath the shade of Krishnachura trees (Royal poinciana),
Their red flowers behold as I passed by the Guwahati University
road.*

*With an unseen weight upon my chest,
I stepped forward as a tortoise towards an unknown world.*

*Restlessness, ignorance, fear mingled with curiosity,
as my silent heart slowly entered a new universe.*

*New rooms, new faces, the strangeness and calmness of unfamiliar
walls.*

*White shirts, black pants, hair trimmed shorter than my comfort
level.*

*Fingerprints of discipline on my cheeks, a silent bell announcing
change.*

That day carved itself deep into memory.

*In the classroom I was introduced to unfamiliar faces and thus began a
long adventure.*

Days I never thought I'd store carefully in my mind,

Yet here they are, etched deeper than I expected.

From nearby homes we gathered and today we stand transformed.

Somewhere between who we were and who the college shaped us.

Between these years were fights, dances, friendships and love.

*Laughter and silent tears and the emotional tragedies only life
could script.*

Examinations tested knowledge, viva tested courage.

I wondered, alike Eklavya, what I can offer to my mentors.

But you all are always respected from the heart.

*Today is the final day, Bitter and sweet together, today, I am ready to
run.*

Laughter trembling, eyes speaking a language words cannot translate.
I have walked far from home, yet the road ahead stretches endlessly.
May I bow with humility, so pride never turns me away from grace.
These are the truths I tried to shape into poetry, the farewell speech
of my college days.
Today, I leave them here, not as perfect words, but as honest ones.

Chapter 5

How Dhoni Transformed to Pandya

TIME: "Between" 2007-2013,

*"You could call it self-obsession or self-respect, but the truth is,
I love everything about myself".* **Hardik Pandya**

(Inspirational quotes from Social Media.)

Dhoni's Calm to Hardik's Swag: The Hostel Behind

Until my hostel days, I was the Dhoni of our cricket team as I mentioned earlier. When I entered Dr J.C.B. Hostel No. 1 our seniors instructed us to practice cricket every morning from 6 am to 8 am, and in the afternoons, after classes until it got dark, when the sun could no longer light up our field. During this period, Sanjay Pegu, one of our seniors was the leader of our group.

We were expected to bowl more during practice because our seniors preferred batting. As newcomers and during our ragging phase, we had little choice but to comply. I used to bowl fast running in from a distance and I enjoyed delivering yorkers and bouncers. Within a few days I also learned how to swing the ball. I experimented with different deliveries and my seniors began to struggle against my bowling. That marked the beginning of my career as a bowler, although deep down, I knew I was meant to be a specialist wicketkeeper-batsman, a role I had always cherished since childhood.

We practised relentlessly morning and evening until we were exhausted. We, the newcomers had to bowl longer often until we were too hungry and tired to continue. But I cherished bowling because it allowed me to experiment and helped developing my skills. It was the perfect platform for me to

outsmart my seniors during ragging and they didn't mind because it was all part of the game and got a kick out of it. That's the beauty of sports, competition happens in a friendly manner. In real life however competition is far tougher and taking it as a friendly challenge can be difficult.

It's cricket that taught me how to maintain patience during tough times, how to avoid giving up when faced with challenges and how to never let the opposition get an advantage. The success of any cricket match relies on practice, hard work, belief, planning, obeying the captain and most importantly performing with discipline for a challenging situation. All of these principles are equally important in life. Cricket is not just a game; it's the mirror of life. We learn to handle both physical and mental challenges; when a bouncer is aimed at your head and you must have the courage to face it. Identically, in life we must learn to make tough decisions and defend ourselves when necessary.

There are some split seconds, when yorkers are bowled at you and the only option is to defend it to stay in the contest. Sometimes, as a wicketkeeper batsman, you must adopt a defensive strategy when a seemingly strenuous ball is coming your way. There is always pressure on the batsman to make runs, even if the ball is difficult to play. But one thing is clear, you can never afford to lose your wicket. Cricket doesn't give you a second chance except in test matches.

In life we must be as strategic as in cricket, balancing our spell between studying and earning, both of which are important. Struggles are inevitable at every stage of life, but we need to plan and adapt. Only through struggle can we experience true joy. The heart is healthiest when we work hard through physical exercise and happiest when we achieve our dreams after strategic planning, both achieved at winning a cricket match.

In cricket, we learn the value of patience. When a batsman gets tired during long innings, they need to stay focused because a single mistake could cost the team the match. The

same goes for bowlers, you must have a brave heart to face a batsman in form, especially during the crucial overs of the competition. In moments of high-tension battle both the heartbeat and the mind start racing fast. A bowler can make mistakes, and that can affect the whole team. Staying calm and in control of your emotions during these crucial moments is essential for success, both in cricket and in life.

Fielding also teaches key insight, a fielder might have to catch a difficult ball or stop one that is heading far away. Its only possible through practice, hard work and the will to succeed. In a split of second the fielder must make a decision and if the catch is successful the whole team celebrates. But if the fielder misses the catch there is no criticism because they gave their best. If the fielder didn't attempt the catch due to fear of injury the audience disappointed. Life is much the same, we must always give our best and takes risks to succeed while also bearing to mind that safety and protection are crucial.

In our hostel week we had two major cricket events the ALU team vs. the NALU team match and the Super-Six tournament. ALU stood for **"All Lovers United,"** composed of boys having girlfriends and NALU stood for **"All Non-Lovers United,"** consisting of those without girlfriends. In the Super-Six format, each team had six players, and everyone had to bowl one over. The boundaries were small and typical targets ranged from 120 to 130 runs.

In my first year our team reached the final and I bowled the fourth over taking a hat-trick for just 10 runs. We won the match and I became famous for my bowling earning a spot as a bowler in the hostel team. We also participated in a college tournament where I batted at No. 7 and hit four long sixes. As a bowler, I took the wicket of Dr Joy Sarma, one of the best batsman in our hostel with an in-swing delivery. He had no answer to it. That match was memorable as I took three wickets in my four-over spell and we won the match. Unfortunately we lost in the semi-finals due to a batting

collapse. But I still reminisce batting at No. 7 and blunting those big sixes beyond the boundary.

The following year we won the Super-Six college week tournament and I was awarded the Man of the Match in the final. This victory earned me a place in the college team as a strike fast bowler and a tail-end batsman who could hit the ball hard. My ability to hit big shots similar to the helicopter shot, pull shot and switch hit learned from my school cricket days helped me a lot. I reshaped my batting to suit the demands of the lower order, often walking in at No. 7 when the game needed urgency rather than patience. In doing so, my role slowly changed from a calm wicketkeeper-batsman alike Dhoni to a bold all-rounder in the mould of Hardik Pandya. The quiet composure of Captain cool began to blend with a new fearless spirit, marking a small yet meaningful transformation in my cricketing journey.

We participated in several inter-college tournaments across Guwahati playing teams against Guwahati University, Nagaon College, Downtown University and more. One of the matches against Nagaon College was intense. Our batting collapsed but I came in at No. 7 and played well, clouting three consecutive sixes against a spinner. With the ball I took four wickets but unfortunately we lost the match. We played at various grounds of Guwahati, including Latashil, ground near the Secretariat-Dispur, Girijananda College-Azara, Veterinary College-Khanapara, GMCH--Bhangagarh and AEC playground.

In one memorable match against the Assam Engineering College team I was bowling slower balls and my first two deliveries were hit for boundaries by one of their batsman. He was from Hostel No. 4 and I knew him well. Following the hits I decided to deliver a fast bouncer, unfortunately the ball struck him on the face. He wasn't wearing a helmet and I later learned that his two front incisors had been broken. Though

it wasn't my fault as he had chosen not to wear a helmet but I felt remorse for him. That day I learned a crucial moral, safety comes first, protection is paramount in life and taking unnecessary risks should be avoided. Like cricket, in a life we must have backup plans for when our primary strategy is unsuccessful. I remained a core member of the team throughout my college years and cricket remained a huge part of my life. We never know when life takes an unexpected turn and some-moments its not the path we envisioned. As a child I had many dreams but I ended up pursuing Ayurvedic medical studies. I never envisaged I would pen down yet here I am writing. As I look back I see how I transformed from being a wicketkeeper-batsman to a fast bowler with solid-driving capabilities much similar to Dhoni evolving into hard-hitting Hardik Pandya in my vision.

Hostel is a moment where knowledge meets curiosity, experience meets aspiration and wisdom illuminates young minds. It is not just institutions of learning but vibrant center's where ideas grow, perspectives expand and inspiration takes flight.

Ghost Encounter: In the Hostel

Hostel life is never complete without a few unforgettable mischief. One such night still lives vividly in my memory. One night, around 1 a.m., when the entire hostel was wrapped in deep silence and everyone was fast asleep, three of us, Samir, Zaman and I, planned a little adventure. Our idea was simple but exciting. We wanted to see how our hostel mates would react if they suddenly saw a ghost in the middle of the night.

Of course, every ghost needs a proper appearance. Samir volunteered to play the role. He dressed himself in a rather creative costume , he wrapped a sack-jute bag around his body, wore a helmet for head protection (in case someone

attacked the ghost!) and put on a frightening ghost mask. In the dim light, he actually looked quite terrifying. Our plan was clever. From each room we would quietly call one roommate outside on the pretext of something urgent. Meanwhile, our “ghost” would enter the room where the other roommate was sleeping. Then we would observe the reaction.

The mission began with Room No. 1. We quietly knocked and called one of the roommates outside, whispering that there was something urgent. Meanwhile, inside the room, Jayanta was sleeping peacefully, completely unaware of the ghostly drama about to unfold.

The light in the room had already been switched off, so the room was dark. Suddenly the ghost, Samir, slowly entered the room and began moving Jayanta’s mosquito net on the bed from one corner. After a moment, Jayanta woke up, confused by the strange movement. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw a tall, strange white figure standing near him. For a few seconds he froze. Then suddenly he jumped out of the bed and ran straight out of the room!

Outside, the three of us burst into uncontrollable laughter. Soon Jayanta realized the truth and though he was still shocked, he joined our laughter too. Now our group had grown from three to five and the fun had just begun. We moved to the next room and repeated the same trick. Each room produced a completely different reaction. One boy screamed loudly. Another jumped out of bed and hid behind a chair. Someone tried to throw a pillow at the ghost. One brave fellow simply stared in shock without moving at all. With every room, more hostel borders woke up and joined our mischievous adventure. The **“ghost hunting team”** kept growing. Finally, full of excitement, we decided to extend our mission to the workers room as well.

Inside, Naren Barman was sleeping peacefully. As usual, one of us called him outside. Then the ghost slowly entered the room. The moment Barman opened his eyes and saw the terrifying figure standing before him; he didn't wait even for a second. He jumped up and ran out of the room, out of the hostel building and almost into the open field without even looking back! We laughed so hard that our stomachs began to hurt. However, not everyone appreciated our midnight adventure. A few of the senior boys were not very happy with our ghost plan and scolded us for disturbing everyone's sleep. But for us, that night became one of the most memorable and hilarious incidents of hostel life. That night also revealed something interesting. We discovered that the boys who looked physically strong were often the most frightened, while some of the thin, quiet boys turned out to be surprisingly brave.

But in truth, when someone suddenly sees a ghost in the darkness of night, fear does not ask whether a person is strong or weak, everyone reacts! Even today, whenever we meet or talk about our hostel days, the **"Ghost Night"** always returns with laughter. It remains one of those precious memories that will stay with us for a lifetime

Excursion Experiences: Beyond the Horizon

During this period I cherished life to the fullest gaining invaluable knowledge and experiences. Our class went on two major excursions, one to North India visiting Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Ajmer, Pushkar and Jodhpur, and another to South India covering Chennai, Kanya Kumari, Kerala, Trivandrum, Goa and Mumbai. These trips were filled with fun and learning both wrapping our academic courses and personal growth. A few funny incidents stood out.

We learned how to handle interactions with third gender people who often solicit funds on the train, how to keep our

luggage safe, and how to deal with outsiders. We also experienced the radiance of different cultures and historic sites. One time, a beggar in Kanya Kumari asked for one rupee and when given two, he replied, **“Wait, wait, take back one rupee”** showing the mannerisms that left us impressed despite his circumstances.

On another occasion we were staying in a hotel room and the light from outside was bothering us. We asked one of our friends to switch it off, but by mistake he pressed the calling bell instead. In a moment he slipped back into the room, quietly closing the door behind him. From the corridor came the faint sound of a neighbouring door opening, yet when we looked, no one was there. It caused a lot of confusion of the person and laughter among us.

Mobile Lost Drama: Tit for Tat

Once during a train tour, our friend Zehi left his mobile on the seat and went to the toilet. At that time mobile was costly item for all of us. I secretly picked it up, planning a harmless prank. When he returned and could not find his phone, panic spread across his face. We joined the act, pretending to search everywhere. His ears and face turned red with anxiety. Finally, we revealed the truth and handed the phone back. Relief washed over him and his smile returned as his face slowly regained its normal color.

A few minutes later, I went to the toilet with my own phone and absentmindedly left it there in a shelf. Only after five minutes did I realize my mistake. I rushed back in panic, but the phone was gone. Just moments earlier we had laughed at Zehi's worry and now I was the one standing helpless. That day taught me a quiet but lasting lesson, **never make fun of someone's personal belongings or feelings. What seems just like a joke to us may carry deep value for another** and life has a strange way of returning our actions to us.

A Woman can calm down the Storm easily

It was our first visit to Delhi, a city that seemed to breathe history and chaos at the same time. Among all the places we wished to see, the bustling lanes of **Chandni Chowk** stood at the top of our list. The market was alive like a restless river, people flowing from every direction, voices mixing with the calls of shopkeepers, the smell of spices floating in the air and colorful fabrics hanging from every shop such as fragments of a rainbow.

We were a large group of friends that day, so we divided ourselves into smaller groups to make shopping easier. Everyone agreed on one rule; no matter where we wandered, we would return to the starting point by 4 p.m. I was walking with Chanchal and Nandita.

Our excitement was difficult to hide. It was our first time in Delhi, and every lane seemed to invite us to explore it. But at the same time, the ticking clock pushed us forward; we had limited time and too many things to see. Chanchal had a peculiar way of walking. Perhaps unconsciously, he walked alike a bodybuilder, with his chest slightly out and his arms held a little away from his body, swinging as he moved through the crowd. As we turned left at one of the crowded corners of Chandni Chowk, an unfortunate moment unfolded. Because of the sudden turn and the constant movement of people around us, Chanchal's hand accidentally slipped into the narrow space between a passing lady's arm and the side of her body as they crossed paths. It lasted only a second. But sometimes a second is enough to create a storm. The lady instantly turned around, her face filled with anger. Her voice rose above the noise of the market as she began shouting at him.

For a moment we were stunned. I quickly tried to explain that it had happened by mistake. The crowd was pushing everyone

and his hand had moved unintentionally. But she was not ready to listen. In a place where hundreds of strangers brushed past each other every minute, trust was fragile and suspicion was strong. The situation was becoming uncomfortable. Just then Nandita, who had stepped aside for a moment to check a shop, returned and saw the tension. She calmly approached the lady and spoke to her gently.

She explained that we were friends, that we had come from far away, and that the incident had been nothing more than an accident. Something changed in the atmosphere the moment Nandita spoke. Perhaps it was the tone of her voice which she had expertise. The anger slowly faded from the lady's face. After a few seconds of silence, she nodded slightly and walked away. The storm had passed.

That day I realized something simple yet profound, sometimes only a woman can truly calm another woman's wounded dignity better way. And another thought quietly followed if that day only Chanchal and I had been there, without Nandita, the misunderstanding might have turned into something far worse in a crowded place like Chandni Chowk, emotions can ignite like dry grass. **A small mistake could have easily turned into public humiliation.**

When “Sorry” Was Not Enough

Another warning came to me in a very different place, far from crowded markets, under the open sky of the sea. During a trip to Goa, a group of us boarded a cruise for the first time in our lives. For many of us, it felt such as stepping into a dream. The sea stretched endlessly around us, shimmering under the fading sunlight. Music floated through the air as people danced on the deck, their laughter blending with the sound of waves striking the sides of the ship. We danced, we laughed, and we watched the horizon together. At one magical moment, dolphins appeared beside the cruise. They

leaped out of the water in graceful arcs, as if performing a silent ballet for the people watching from the deck. Their movements were so beautiful that everyone stood mesmerized.

Later, I quietly walked away from the crowd and stood at a corner of the cruise. Sometimes joy becomes even deeper when shared with silence. The wind was strong and cool, brushing continuously against my face. I watched the sea moving in gentle waves, a slow, rhythmic dance that made the vast ocean feel alive. Standing there, lost in thought, my mouth had become dry because of the constant cool wind. Without thinking much, I leaned slightly and spat toward the sea. But the wind had its own plans. A tiny droplet, carried back by the rushing air, landed on the hand of a lady standing beside me. She noticed it immediately. Turning slightly toward me, she said, "Excuse me." Her eyes pointed quietly to the small drop resting on her skin. Embarrassment rushed through me. I immediately apologized and explained that the wind had blown it back unintentionally. I truly felt ashamed. But she said nothing. Instead, she slowly rubbed her hand against my hand, wiping the droplet away and then began to walk away. Before leaving, she said just one sentence, **"Sorry is not enough."**

Her words were simple, yet they struck me deeply. For a few moments I stood there silently, watching the endless sea. Inside my mind, I tried to calm myself by repeating softly, *All is well... all is well*. But the sentence she had spoken kept echoing within me. Later I realized something important. Perhaps I should have immediately cleaned her hand myself. But she was a woman, and I hesitated to touch her hand out of respect. My hesitation, however respectful it may have been, did not solve the problem. That evening the vast sea taught me a quiet moral. In life, mistakes are sometimes inevitable. But responsibility does not end with an apology. **Because sometimes "Sorry" is not enough.** Sometimes respect requires action, courage and presence of mind and

that realization stayed with me long after the cruise disappeared into the horizon.

The Price of Cheap

During our excursion to Jodhpur, we were travelling with very limited money. Every rupee mattered to us. One day in the market we saw bright oranges, but when we asked the price, the shopkeeper said seventy rupees per kilogram. We were shocked, because in our hometown oranges cost only thirty or forty rupees. For a moment we thought the shopkeepers were looting outsiders. Later we understood the truth; Jodhpur had no local orange production, so the fruits were brought from distant states. Transportation made them costly.

That evening one of our friends returned from the market proudly carrying a bag of oranges. “I got them for twenty rupees per kilogram,” he said happily. We were surprised by the cheap price. He offered us the fruits, and we eagerly started eating them. But the first bite changed everything. The oranges were terribly sour. Even all of us together could hardly finish two pieces. The rest quietly ended their last breath in the hotel dustbin.

That day the sour oranges taught us a silent experience; **never run blindly behind a discount without understanding the reason. Every cheap offer hides a truth.** In Life also some people also come with excessive sweetness when they need us, just like discounted oranges that look attractive from outside. **But when time changes, their real taste appear and** such as those sour oranges, fake friends too eventually find their place in the dustbin of life.

Refreshing our Mental Pollution

In those days, society outside the hostel walls was full of invisible divisions. People who wore a lungi and tupi and spoke the Bengali language were often viewed with suspicion. Many casually labeled them as “Bangladeshi,” as if a language or a piece of clothing could decide someone’s identity. Such attitudes were common in villages and towns, and these prejudices silently shaped people’s minds.

But inside our hostel, life was very different. Our hostel was such as a small world of its own. Students came from different villages, communities, religions and cultural backgrounds. Some spoke Assamese, some Bengali, some Hindi, and a few even spoke local languages at home. Our food habits were different, our traditions were different, and even our ways of thinking were not the same. Yet somehow, within the narrow walls of the hostel, these differences slowly melted away. We lived together, studied together, fought occasionally like brothers, and laughed together every evening. Among us were Muslim, Christian and Hindu students who followed their own traditional and regional delicacies food habits without hesitation. We also had Marwari boarders in our hostel, such as Lahit Agarwal. He was a strict vegetarian. While the hostel kitchen often prepared different kinds of meals, Lahit never complained. Quietly and patiently, he arranged his own vegetarian food and adjusted himself to hostel life. His discipline and simplicity earned everyone’s respect. There were also a few boys who happily ate almost every type of food. We used to tease them jokingly and call them “carnivorous people.” These jokes never created bitterness; instead, they strengthened our friendship and made our hostel life lively and joyful.

However, the most memorable tradition of our hostel was something we called a way of **“cleaning our minds.”** Every year, on **the night of 31st December**, when the entire world prepared to welcome a new year, we organized a special gathering in our hostel courtyard. The winter air of December in Assam would be cold and quiet. Under the dim hostel lights, we would sit together in a long line outside the building. Cooking would take place at two different corners of the courtyard. At one place, one kind of traditional dish would be prepared, while at another corner, a different type of dish would be cooked. The aroma of spices and firewood slowly filled the air, mixing with laughter, jokes and the excitement of the last night of the year. When the food was ready, everyone would sit in two groups. Each group chose the food according to their personal preferences and cultural habits. The arrangement looked simple, but the meaning behind it was deeper than we realized at that age. It was not merely about food. It was our silent declaration that differences in food habits should never divide human hearts. In a society where people often argued about religion, caste, and culture, we young hostel boys were unknowingly building a small world based on acceptance and mutual respect. That night every year reminded us that unity was stronger than prejudice.

Our hostel also became a place where festivals lost their boundaries. During Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, the common room of our hostel would transform into a small temple. All the boarders gathered together in the evening. The floor would be covered with mats and we would sit in a circle.

Our hostel worker, **Deka da**, played a very special role in these gatherings. In his calm and melodious voice, he would read passages from the **Bhagavad Gita**. His voice carried a

quiet devotion that filled the room with a peaceful atmosphere. Even the most mischievous boys in the hostel would sit silently, listening with respect. After the chanting ended, we would receive prasad. Plates of fruits would be passed around, and finally we would enjoy the most awaited dish of the evening, a bowl of warm and sweet payesh. The simple taste of that rice pudding, shared among friends, made the celebration feel complete. Similarly when the month of Ramadan arrived, the muslim boarders brought the same spirit of sharing into the hostel. As the sun set and the time for Iftar approached, they would invite the Hindu students to join them. Dates, fruits, and simple homemade dishes were arranged carefully. The moment of breaking the fast felt such as a festival in itself. We all sat together, talking, laughing and enjoying the food. No one felt as an outsider. In those moments, religion did not separate us; instead, it became another reason to come together.

Looking back now, I realize that our hostel was more than just a place for education. **It was a small training ground where we unknowingly learned the true meaning of humanity.** Within those simple hostel walls, we were quietly cleaning our minds of prejudice, one shared meal and one shared festival at a time.

Chapter 6

How Pandya became a doctor

TIME: Between 2010-2013,

*"When I got the call for the national team,
I thought God wanted me to do something amazing."*

*"Actually, it's quite remarkable. One year ago, even the Ambanis didn't
know who Hardik Pandya was." **Hardik Pandya.***

(Inspirational quotes from Social Media)

Stethoscopes and Soulmates: When Doctors Fall in Love.

Without love, stories are like oceans without inhabitants, gardens without flowers and life without heart and soul. For me, love arrived during the final years of my course at college. I had completed almost four and a half years of study and was now in the internship phase.

It was during my duty in the obstetrics and gynaecology department that I met her, **Rosy**. One of our juniors who had been receiving saline and painkiller injections and was in excruciating pain. She was moaning with discomfort, her eyes red and full of unshed tears, but she smiled through the agony, remained stoic, though she was under the weather. Her friends, Simran and Shital tried to ease her pain with jokes and distractions, including asking me to turn on the television to a drama that she liked. I did so as they requested though I was more interested in the cricket match.

Her pain intensified and Simran asked me to administer another painkiller injection but she hesitated. Eventually, a nurse administered it. As I watched her struggle, my heart

ached. I didn't show my feelings as I was a senior but on that day, I developed a crush on her. The girl who endured her pain with such strength and grace became someone I couldn't stop thinking of. This was the sliding doors moments in my life. That afternoon after her family arrived she was transferred to a cabin. I confided in my friend during an evening walk on the Guwahati University campus that I had started to develop attachment for her though I would wait to express them as she was ill. My friend supported me advising that if she was meant for me she would be mine one day.

That night I struggled to sleep, experienced both anxious and overwhelmed. The next day I returned to the hospital and visited her in her cabin. Her mother was with her and she introduced me to her as a senior from the same region- lower Assam. Her mother offered me a snack but I declined claiming a stomach issue, though in truth, my discomfort stemmed from something deeper, heartache I couldn't yet express.

Two days later after she was discharged, I gathered her contact details and started messaging her checking on her health. We became wonderful friends and over dates, my dedication for her deepened. I wrote her poems in Assamese which she appreciated.

Eventually, I expressed my tenderheartedness to her. She was clear that she could not fall for enchantment without her family's approval but she agreed to remain friends in the meantime. We continued meeting always keeping a distance but it felt as though we were meant for each other. I felt that one day her family would give us their blessing. I am endlessly grateful for the soft spot we shared.

A few lines from my diary, not just words but the quiet languages of my spoken smitten love in those days. "In those moments listened without interruption, called to mind the smallest details you had shared with out a murmur. My love spoke through presence, not promises, through laughter that needed no reason, through the way I chose **us** even in my

thoughts. It lived in ordinary things, saving a story to tell you later, walking slower to match your pace and finding home in conversations that had no end. Those were not just days we spent together; they were the dialects of a amour that didn't need grand declarations to be deeply understood.

“You have brought immense happiness into my life. Your cherish has become a constant source of strength and comfort. I never imagined your adoration was written in my destiny, as if inscribed on my palm and forehead. In the past, I used to press the pimples on my forehead, leaving marks and dark spots behind. Today I realise that within that darkness you were written hidden such as a precious diamond inside black coal, like a rare gem concealed within a conch shell.

I feel incredibly lucky to have someone as wonderful and rare as you, a diamond discovered where no one expects one to exist. You are the most secret, the most unexpected and the most perfectly timed gift of my life. You revealed the person of my dreams, yet you surpassed every fantasy because you are real, not an illusion.

Your presence is the most fortunate treasure I have ever known. You are the core, the vital part of my life like the bond between the Earth and the Moon. Being with you feels such as standing inside a garden full of butterflies and flowers. You are the elixir that renews my existence. Even a short time with you fills me with energy and purpose.

Your words erase my darkest moods and your touch awakens my happiness. Every moment we have shared is precious and those memories flow through my life like a current, revealing the depth of your presence in my heart. Your smile, your kindness and the unforgettable moments we shared will live in my memory forever.

Your touch sends a pulse through my veins and my heartbeat quickens whenever I see your face. When you are near, my chest feels fuller, as if my breath deepens. Your presence is like a gentle melody. Your eyes glow naturally and when your smile reaches them, they bloom alike the rising sun.

Your voice moves through me comparable to calm waves and when you graze me, a sudden shiver runs down my spine. Your scent is my favourite, treasured deeply by my senses. My neurons spark, my synapses fire and energy flows through every muscle and tendon, responding to your love. My body-muscles, veins, heart, and soul-merge into one sweet rhythm. Dopamine flows through my system, and when I connect with you emotionally, it feels as though an invisible magnetic force forms between us.

You have become the quiet certainty in my chaos, the warmth in my winters and the calm horizon beyond every storm. In your absence the world feels incomplete; in your presence even silence carries meaning. You are the light that does not dazzle but gently illuminates, the kind that guides rather than blinds.

Loving you feels like discovering a language my soul always knew but had forgotten to speak. In your laughter I hear the promise of tomorrow, and in your stillness I find the peace of eternity. If destiny is a story, then you are its most beautiful chapter written not in ink but in heartbeat and breath.

Yet beyond this science of the heart lies a poetry only your presence can compose. You have turned ordinary days into sacred verses and silent nights into quiet symphonies. With you, even a season feels such as a single moment, as if time pauses within its own flow.”

Love came to me unexpectedly, in a hospital, during an ordinary moment in an unexpected situation. I never thought

it was the right instance to show my love intention. There was no warning and no planning, just a quiet, sudden sense that changed everything. The wrong time became the right one and the difficult situation turned into something beautiful. Love never asks for permission; it simply happens. It transforms that spell and circumstances into something real and meaningful span.

As the harsh world fades away, something awakened deep inside my heart something far more valuable than diamonds, platinum or any gem. It is delicate yet strong, soft yet firm; kind and intense; jealous and wounded; smiling and angry; calm and passionate, all existing together in perfect balance. That treasure is you.

You are an angel, filled with irresistible charm. When I am with you, or you with me, wherever we go, we feel like flying birds, lovebirds; pure, gentle and free, such as a soft, cooling breeze. Love has no limits and asks for nothing in return. You love people for who they truly are unfiltered and unpolished and this beautiful love flows through you in every waking moment of your life.

A few of my poems are highlighted here, which I have written during that period. Though these are poetic language but actually show the incident of our lives. When we met in the beginning, I was so completely flabbergasted that, unable to speak. You're right up my alley when I think in silence so I decided to write you many poems. Someone can imagine these as the romantic movie songs of our lives.

No 1: You

Your colour is fair, your mind is soft and tender.

You carry yourself with the grace of fresh autumn air.

Delicate as the butterfly, soft as cloud.

Sweet and innocent as pure as fresh milk.

Your eyes are alike the marble of the Taj Mahal.

And shape as such as lotus petals.
Your cheeks are freshly blooming rose .
Your body is shy like the lineage of the sensitive Lazuki lata (Mimosa pudica).
Your skin is as soft as argil-potter's clay.
At the centre of it all, you shine as a silver crescent moon.
You look alike the aesthetics of Manali and Kashmir.
On your head flows the coolness of ocean waves.
Your body curves in a winding mountain road.

Your palms are as tender as a baby dove.
Your hands flutter as a half-asleep birds.
The soles of your feet looked fresh mango leaves.
Your legs tremble as the strings of a guitar.

When you come closer to me,
It realise, I am resting on a cloud of peace.
When you smile,
Your eyes and teeth flash like a light-catcher.
Your touch sends shivers through my spine,
My heart starts trembling in response.
I don't know how many volts of electricity run through you.
But I am transforming a transformer powered by your current.
Even when my heart aches, I can't forget you.
The sound of your laughter sticks to my eardrums.
With the rhythm of your heartbeat, my heart begins to whirl.

*I meet you even in sleep, where dreams realise as if reality.
Sometimes we go out, wandering restlessly;
Sometimes we stay calm and quiet,
Pretending to be tired and relaxed.
Don't want to snuff out of my dream,
As will not find you in reality.*

No 2: In Love

*Every vocable from your mouth captivates me.
Some-instances they unfold as fury looked alike fire,
Yet each word carries its own unique charm.
Some of your linguistic form a lovey-dovey vibrations,
Others touch the deepest corners of my heart.
While other strike straight to my chest without warning.*

*I felt connected with the sound come from the corner of your mouth.
Your words encircle my mind akin whirlwind.
Keeps me busy for the whole day with their echoes.
I speak less than you but like to listen all your words alike lure.
Each one carries a different compassion, a unique sensation.
Each line you speak endure like the most ethereal I've ever heard.
You know how to express yourself so perfectly, as a gentle melody
to my ears.
My heart senses their fragrance and begins to vibrate.
The line, I love you when comes from you, feels deeper.
Its the most beautiful, when it leave dripping on your lips.*

No 3: (Written in melancholy)

Our First Meeting

Once upon a time, you were the kind of a girl.....

You would come to my life as dream and then disappeared again.

You wouldn't tell me to cut the phone till charge is on, if I did, you rebuked alike a child.

The very first in a flash we met, you held my hand, after riding the bike, you sat so gracefully on the roadside.

You resisted the first meeting- honestly, but later, fell deeply magnetic with that meeting.

You turned bus stops into meeting spots, objected to sitting far away, never hesitated to call me closer.

You stared at me for so long, measured with your eyes., breathed in peace, believing you'd be able to wear heels beside me.

You warned me to be careful whenever I travelled alone by train, fought with me so that I would not pick pernicious habits in the hostel.

You forbade me from looking at other girls, loved me so deeply, with so much affection, taught me everything from A, B, and C, though I only knew a little.

You fed me sweets from JB's and Milano biscuits from Motu's shop, secretly gave me chocolates in front of the college, cooked delicious Maggi with so much warmth.

After every prayers, you prayed for me that filled my heart with lots of devotion to protect me, you even placed a quote from the Quran on the bike.

You worried about my job, yet you were happy just because I cared for you.

I wonder you are the same girl or not as I imagined.....

No 4: My Moon

*I once imagined you as my moon in the sky,
On a dark moonless night, I was searching silently for you .
Clouds had enclosed you from all around,
Yet in the rumbling of thunder, still could glimpse limbus of lunar
outline.
That very sound stamped a heartache into my heart,
Which obliged me a lunar mission towards the lunar orbit.
From a distressed corner of the Earth, I dared to dream,
With that dream, my mind takeoff to you, my Moon.
In one October with fondness, I finally landed on the moon,
Five months sipped away alike a fleeting summer breeze, the voyage lost
in a moment of memories.
I spotted a specific space within the moon's universe, felt such as
selenophile,
In my heart, imagined myself as the moon's king.
My soul spread its petals, aching to cradle the silver moon upon the
Earth,
They mistook the glow on face for my own, but it was merely the sky's
silver queen visiting my face.

Then one day silently, that beloved moon began to weep, unable to return
to Earth,
Perhaps she never knew that her tears became floods upon the Earth.
She had many responsibilities, many reasons to remain in the sky,
For the cause, she wished to illuminate the Earth to light up the world.
Now myself swimming through Earth's flooded waters, searching for her,*

*Swimming and swimming, I have grown tired, worn down.
Truly, today I feel blessed that I had walked in moon's world,
The whisper in my chest grows cold, revealing the story I was told was
never true.
Is it ? by slip-up, I dreamed, I was wandering around the sun thinking
moon,
But I know, we were impassioned with each other.
I want to tell her, I am on Earth; yet I am not dead,
I will remain gazing with optimism into the radiant sky.
I do not believe these thoughts of deception,
I refuse to accept you as the red hot sun.
Perhaps you can feel the ache of my chest,
Perhaps you know how to dry up the flood of my world.
I will not call you the sun, as I felt that you were the moon,
If my love, my passions are not false, then you are my moon.
I wish to remain immersed in the coolness of your heart,
Do not scorch me with your anger, do not frighten me as the sun.
I want the brightness and a touch of full moon in my life,
Because I know you adored me on that very dark night.
Even now, twice every month come as the new full moon,
For you, I will wait in this frightened world, gazing at the sky.
You will come, yes, you will, one day you will descend to Earth,
And will carry me with you, flying away as a angel from moon.
This is my faith for my adoration and is also the prayer of my love,
And if not, then one day I will be a star.
Remaining beside you forever, unknown, unnamed,*

Just like the Japanese expression “the moon is beautiful , isn’t it?”

What magic lives within your love that turns me into a mad dreamer?

Within your words, my peace lies hidden, carrying me away to a city of illusion. I became a devotee of your smile, without which I remain incomplete, unheard. Even your scolding strikes my heart, leaving my mind unable to think at all. Your amour is the nourishment of my soul; without it, I am merely a lifeless being. When I hold your hand, I find peace. When you smile, it considers current and lightning flashes strike together. A single touch of thine sends a tremor through my heart. I don’t know how much voltage you carry within you. Even when my heart aches, I cannot forget you, I could die happy.

The Unseen Threat: A Hidden Trap.

In 2012, an incident occurred that put our relationship to the test. It was just after the gang rape and murder incident in Delhi, which had sparked protests across India. At that moment, the media and police were very active in addressing rape cases. One of Rosy’s friends contacted her, claiming that his mother was critically ill in the GMCH ICU. He asked Rosy to arrange for a caretaker for his mother, offering to pay for the service. Rosy engaged a widow, aged 55, who had prior experience as a caretaker.

However, after two days, the caretaker went missing. Her phone was turned off, and there was no trace of her. This created a lot of pressure on us, especially when the caretaker’s family incriminated us for her disappearance. Two days later, they reported the caretaker’s absence to the police, claiming she had been raped and dumped near an overpass. A group of

mafia tried to implicate us without proof. Being a student, it was a huge burden for us and it felt such as we went down a rabbit hole for few days.

The police conducted medical examinations and observed no evidence of rape. A journalist then threatened us, demanding money in exchange for not reporting the story in news. The mafia threatened us to lodge F.I.R. against us. Despite the stress, we managed to establish our alibi with the help of Rosy's distant relative, who worked in the office of superintendent of police. The complaint was eventually withdrawn, but the incident brought us closer as we faced the challenge together using our discretion.

The Story of a Fish: A Journey Beyond the Well

Once there lived a fish inside a deep, forgotten well. The water in that well was dark and polluted, thick with frustration, depression, pain, loneliness, ego, inferiority complexes, bad habits, petty politics, countless negative thoughts and a lack of confidence. It was a suffocating world where hope rarely reached. The fish had been born in that water and had grown up breathing its bitterness. To the fish, that murky world seemed such as the only life that could ever exist.

But one day, something unexpected happened. A tiny crack appeared in the wall of the well. Through that crack, a narrow pipe was pushed in and slowly, quietly, fresh water began to flow into the well. The moment the fish sensed the scent of that water, something stirred inside its heart. It felt like a dream. For the first time in its life, the fish imagined leaving the polluted well. It imagined swimming toward the mysterious source of that fresh water. Somewhere beyond the darkness, there might be a place where water flowed freely, perhaps a pond, perhaps a river, perhaps a world it had never known. But dreams often awaken fear. Questions surrounded the fish like shadows.

What if the pipe had no exit?
What if the other side was blocked?
What if the pipe was too narrow for a fish like it, a fish whose
body had grown rough and thorny from years of living in
polluted water?
And what if it could never return once it entered?

The fish had a dream, but it did not yet have confidence. Many times it approached the pipe. Many times it tried to enter and every time, fear pushed it back. The current rushing through the pipe was powerful and the darkness inside it felt endless and frightening. Still, the dream refused to die. One day, the fish finally gathered enough courage to make a decision. Before leaving, it consulted the other creatures in the well, such as the dragon fish and the prawn fish, seeking their thoughts and encouragement. Then, with a trembling heart but a determined spirit, the fish entered the pipe. Inside, there was only darkness. The journey seemed endless. Day after day, the fish swam forward without knowing whether an opening truly existed. The current pushed against its body. Sometimes it felt faint signals through the water, vibrations, scents, whispers of distant movement, but many of them carried doubt and discouragement. The fish grew tired. Fear slowly returned. Sometimes it wondered whether it had made a terrible mistake. Perhaps it should have stayed in the polluted well, where life, at least, was familiar. But deep within its heart, something stronger than fear continued to guide it forward. So the fish kept swimming. Then one day, far ahead in the darkness, it saw a faint light. Hope returned but as the fish moved closer to the opening, another fear rose inside it. The water near the exit was rushing violently, far stronger than anything it had known before. The fish hesitated.

“I was born in polluted water,” it thought.
“Will I even be able to live in pure water?
Will the pure world accept me?
What if I fail the tests waiting outside?”

For a moment, the fish almost turned back. But then it made one final decision. **“If the pure water rejects me,”** it whispered to itself, **“I will return to my polluted well. But at least I will know that I tried.”** During that long journey through darkness, the fish often felt an unseen energy pushing it forward. Though it was only a small fish, it believed in Allah, and in the silence of the dark pipe, it prayed quietly for guidance. Finally, on the morning of **16 October 2013**, the fish crossed the pipe and emerged into a world of pure water. That day was special. Later, the fish recalled that the day was *Eid-ul-Adha*, the day of sacrifice, the day when people surrender their most beloved things for Allah; their ego, their pride, their wrongdoing. The fish realised that it too had made a sacrifice. It had sacrificed its fear. It had left its polluted well behind. Overwhelmed with joy, the fish began swimming wildly in the clear water. It leapt, twirled and danced in the currents as if celebrating a new birth. In its heart, it even felt as offering prayers of gratitude, because it believed that perhaps even fish can pray. At first, the fish did not know where it had arrived. Perhaps it was a pond. Perhaps it was a river. But the water was beautiful, clean, disciplined, rich with oxygen and flowing with freedom. To the fish, it felt as heaven. With excitement, the fish began exploring its new world. It swam through unfamiliar currents, discovering hidden corners beneath the water. Sometimes it found food; sometimes it faced danger. Once it narrowly escaped a fisherman’s trap. Another time, it encountered a terrifying snake near a place that resembled a deep trench. Life in pure water was not always easy. Sometimes the fish cried and sometimes it made mistakes. Occasionally, it even polluted the water around it with its rough old habits, because it had grown up in a polluted environment. While swimming one day, the fish discovered a place near the **Brahmaputra River** called **Bharalu Park in Guwahati**. The water there was not very clean, reminding it of the well it had once left behind. Yet strangely, the fish experienced its first homely breath of oxygen there. That day, the fish understood an important truth; no place in this world is completely bad. It

depends on how we use it. Just as diamonds hide inside coal, sweetness can exist even in places that appear polluted.

Time passed, and the fish continued exploring the vast waters. Then, on **26 January 2014**, it made a discovery that astonished it. All this time, the fish had believed it was swimming in a river, but it had already reached the **Indian Ocean via the Bay of Bengal**. The fish had only dreamed of reaching a river; instead, it had found something far greater, the endless sea. At that moment, a powerful feeling rose in its heart, filled with pride and gratitude. It felt as if the ocean had accepted it. The fish felt akin the king of its ocean and the ocean felt alike the queen of its life. Even the salty water tasted sweet to it, just as salt gives flavour to food and preserves life. The fish made a promise to protect the purity of this ocean and never allow it to become polluted again. Now the fish spends its days swimming joyfully through the vast ocean, exploring mysterious depths, gliding above soft hills of coral, and discovering pearls and diamonds hidden in the seabed. Sometimes it plays near the surface, where the water feels soft like clouds. Sometimes it dives deep into the silent darkness where the ocean guards its ancient secrets. And every single day, the fish thanks Almighty for guiding it through that dark pipe, from the polluted well to the endless ocean because sometimes the journey through darkness does not lead us merely to a river. It leads us to an ocean of possibilities.

Final Reflections: Through the Eyes of the Fish

Sometimes while playing near the surface of my ocean, I would brush against its soft lips. The upper portion of the ocean felt so delicate that even its playful touch seemed almost such as pleasant waves. It was noticed that the lower depths of the ocean felt even cooler and calmer than the surface. Yet I rarely dared to wander there. A quiet fear lived inside me the fear that my restless playfulness might hurt the ocean again. I could never bear to hurt the one I loved. The

ocean is vast beyond imagination. Its broad shoulders are the place where the great ship **Titanic** once met its tragic fate. Its mysterious navel is what humans call the **Bermuda Triangle**, a place that pulls everything toward it as an invisible magnet. But I am only a small fish. How can I possibly explain the greatness of my ocean? What I feel inside my heart is far deeper than what words can ever describe. Perhaps I am afraid to reveal everything because my ocean has already given me more than I ever dreamed of receiving. And somewhere inside, I still hope to receive more kindness from it. For me, the ocean is something sacred, a secret treasure that belongs only to my heart. Like a humble fish, I pray that my queen-my ocean, will always remain happy. Please, my dear ocean, never turn into a **Tsunami of anger** and sorrow. When you cry alike that, it destroys everything in your path, and when you suffer, I suffer too. All I desire is a peaceful life beside you.

Hope the days I once faced will never return again. I have seen the world while travelling the long path from wells to rivers, rivers to oceans and sometimes wells to the small containers or aquariums inside human homes. I fear that your powerful waves might one day throw me out of your oceanic world. If that happens, I might introduce your oceanic water to the people who live on land. But perhaps they will catch me and place me in a pan of hot oil above a burning fire. Even then, I will still wait for you because the salt of the ocean also flows inside human blood. One day, your water and my small existence may meet again inside a human body, flowing together through veins, resting quietly in the chambers of the heart, wandering through the mind, or sleeping silently inside the gall bladder of the liver. And if salty oceanic water ever reaches the human heart, perhaps our souls will meet again there because I have fallen deeply in love with my ocean. Yes, the ocean is salty but now that salt tastes sweet to me. Thank you, my ocean, for giving me a place upon your chest, within your heart, within your endless world. I promise that I will try my best never to pollute you.

Sometimes, being only a fish, I might make mistakes. I might use your water for my own survival. Without the fish, even the ocean would feel empty. God created us to live together. You are my breath, my oxygen, the blood that flows through my body, my food, my shelter, my path, my light, my playground, my entire world, the gentle lullaby that carries me into sleep. You are the one with whom I wish to live and the one with who I wish to die. There is one thing I must say, though it may sound strange. The dirtiest part of the ocean is its foam, which is produced during anger. From the foam comes salt. I love the salt but only in moderation. You have the right to be angry sometimes as nature needs balance.

This is only a story- a story filled with hope and positive meaning. Ignore the shadows within it and keep only the light. I only wanted to show that the ocean lacks nothing. God has already blessed it with natural beauty, strength, and grace. Alike the fish with a positive heart, we can overcome anything. Someone should always be there to say, **“No matter what happens, I will always stand beside you.”** With time, the fish became the ocean’s best friend-a companion in lonely moments, a pillow when one needs rest, a protector when one feels weak, a joker when one needs laughter, a hero when one needs courage. Only blessings are needed to keep the relationship pure and peaceful. Without God, perhaps the fish would never have reached the ocean. For that, they should remain grateful. The ocean is delicate, gentle, rhythmic and elegant. **But its outer beauty is not its greatest treasure; the inner beauty is what the fish loves the most.**

Those golden spells are imprinted in my heart and mind, sometimes I suppose as a wanderer, a sailor in a boat without a destination, moving endlessly on the sea. I hope that one day I can meet **Zubeen Garg**, the heartthrob of Assam and could say, **“Come back again.** We need you to guide us to build a world full of love, compassion, humility, fortitude and contemplation for nature and its creations.”

Love is not merely a feeling. Real love means caring for one another. We can build our lives the way we choose and face every challenge together. The ocean is such a blue cloth and the fish, comparable to a coloured pencil. When guided by an artist, it can paint beautiful colours across life. Together, they create something vibrant and meaningful, a colourful life. Sometimes the craziness is nothing more than love overflowing, like a small fish swimming endlessly through the great ocean of love, continuing to swim beside you quietly, faithfully and forever.

The Final Roll Call: Dr. J. C. B. Boys Hostel No 1

A year passed and I completed my internship, officially becoming Dr Pandya. After saying farewell to my college, hostel and Rosy, I returned home to join the National Rural Health Mission. I had changed, and I was hopeful for the future. I promised Rosy that I would eventually approach her family to ask for her hand in marriage.

I tried to move forward quietly with the help of my parents. My intention was simple to remove the uncertainty between the two families. I told my uncle about my feelings for Rosy and he kindly took the initiative. One day he called her father and expressed his wish to visit their home and discuss the possibility of our marriage in the future.

Their reply came politely but firmly. They said Rosy was still studying and that they did not want to think about her marriage at that moment. Perhaps, they said, the matter could be discussed later if necessary.

I had taken that step because Rosy herself had once told me that she could continue our relationship only if her family accepted us. But after that conversation with her parents, everything slowly changed. The distance between us grew, first because of our long distance and then because of silence.

Her family knew about my intentions, yet they had given no answer. Gradually, Rosy also stopped talking to me. Our conversations were reduced to occasional **WhatsApp** messages. It felt a quiet heartbreak. I knew I loved her, and somewhere in my heart I believed she loved me too, yet we could neither express our feelings nor share our story with anyone. Outwardly we remained just friends, but an invisible wall had risen between us.

After living eight years in hostels from 2004 to 2013, returning home felt strangely lonely. Most of my friends were already busy with their own lives. As a doctor, people around me had begun to treat me with respect and distance. I could no longer roam freely with chill gang in markets or playgrounds as I once did during school days.

In those quiet days, I often missed hostel life, the laughter, the companionship, the freedom. Only a former hosteller can truly understand that emptiness. The sudden silence between Rosy and me made that loneliness even heavier.

Then another unsettling thought reached my ears. Some people said her family did not want to marry their daughter into BATD, Assam, because that region had once witnessed communal conflict between the different communities. Whether it was true or not, the words lingered painfully in my mind, as a result, the distance between us grew and we stopped communicating as frequently.

During this period, I focused on preparing for my post-graduate exams. I felt the strain of being away from my friends, adjusting to life back home and coping with the changes in my relationship. The absence of Rosy and the lack of communication from her family were painful. Yet, I threw myself into studying and training to be a better doctor.

A Fresh Start: Career Up & Love In

In September 2014, Rosy called to inform me that I had passed the entrance exam for my post-graduate studies. I was thrilled. This was a new chapter, and it meant I would be back in Guwahati, where I could reconnect with Rosy.

I enrolled in the Anatomy department of the Ayurvedic college and felt hopeful for the future. We met again during that spell in Guwahati, after an 8-month gap. I took Rosy out for dinner, and it was during that outing that something unexpected happened. My bike was stolen while we were eating and the police investigation caused a stressful few days. Despite this setback, I began to caress closer to Rosy and our relationship started to stabilise.

Fighting the Battle Together

When Rosy and I slowly came close again, our relationship began to move forward quietly, though we still did not have the support of our families. We were trying to build our future with patience and hope. But just at that time, life placed a difficult test before us; Rosy's mother was suddenly diagnosed with breast cancer. The news shook us deeply. More than the disease, the biggest challenge was convincing her mother about the operation and the long treatment ahead. Surgery itself was frightening and chemotherapy and radiation could cause hair loss and many painful side effects. Her mother worried about society and how people would see her, who was a teacher. Yet with patience and care, we slowly counselled her and helped her understand the situation.

Finally, they decided to take a flat in Guwahati for a year so that Rosy's mother could receive proper treatment. We met a lady- real fighter who had once survived the same disease and

her words gave us strength. I also brought books about people who had overcome cancer, because **we understood that along with medical treatment, psychological support was equally important.**

Perhaps it was during those difficult days that our bond became stronger. The surgery at Nemcare Hospital in Guwahati was successful. Being doctor, I also witnessed the surgery entering in the operation theatre. After that she bravely completed six cycles of chemotherapy and twelve rounds of radiation at B. Baruah Cancer Hospital.

Years later, Rosy told me that during those months of treatment, when her mother saw my constant support beside her, her feeling about our relationship had quietly changed. Maybe that is why, in the most difficult moments of life, God slowly guided everything and turned her mother's heart in favor of our relationship as she saw us together as true fighter. Around the same time another incident softened her mother's heart as well. Together, we navigated the challenges of finding the right treatment and ensuring her mother's emotional well-being during her recovery. At that time, I witnessed a remarkable transformation in Rosy-from a timid girl into a mature, strong and brave woman. I saw her care for her mother like a child, often consoling and comforting her, offering every possible support while hiding her own fears and tears. Many nights she would silently break down, yet each morning she woke with a brave, gentle smile, ready to face every obstacle. Perhaps it was this quiet strength of hers that drew me closer to her heart. It awakened in me a deep desire to know the soul behind that brave and gentle smile. As we faced these difficulties together, our bond grew stronger. Rosy's mother eventually accepted our relationship, and our families began to see the positive impact we had shaped in each other's lives.

An Unforgettable Silence: Missing Mother

That evening, destiny quietly wrote another line in our story. Rosy had come to Guwahati with her mother, her brother and their driver for medical treatment. After dinner at a restaurant in Maligaon, her mother stepped outside with the driver to buy a few small things from nearby shops. The market was crowded, noisy and restless. In that chaos, something unexpected happened, she disappeared. Minutes passed then half an hour. They searched every shop, every corner of the street, every passing face. But she was nowhere. With a trembling voice, Rosy called me. **“Mother is missing.”**

The words struck my heart such as a sudden storm. I rushed to Maligaon immediately. Together we searched the streets again and again. Her phone was lying back at the hotel, so there was no way to contact her. Fear slowly began to take over our thoughts. Maybe she had returned to the hotel? But she wasn't there either. The night was getting darker, and our hope was fading. Finally, we decided that if we could not find her soon, we would have to file an FIR at Maligaon Police Station. But something inside me said, search once more. I walked toward Sanjeevani Hospital, nearly a kilometer away from the restaurant. The road was quiet under the dim streetlights. And then, suddenly, I saw a lone figure walking slowly along the roadside, it was her.

In that moment, relief flooded my heart. When we reached her, she looked exhausted and frightened. She told us that she had lost sight of the driver in the crowd and thought she would walk back to the hotel by herself. But in confusion she had taken the wrong road and ended up near Sanjeevani Hospital far away from hotel. Afraid of strangers and possible danger, she did not ask anyone for help. By the time we

brought her back, it was already 12am at night. That night we all breathed again.

But something deeper had changed. From that moment, her mother's heart softened toward me. Perhaps she saw not just a young man beside her daughter, but someone who would stand there in fear, in darkness and in uncertainty. And **sometimes I still believe... maybe we were meant for each other.** Because whenever the path seemed impossible, fate somehow found a way to bring our hearts closer.

By 2017, I had completed my post-graduation, and she was also admitted for her post-graduation in Obstetrics and Gynecology that is Prasuti Tantra and Stri Roga in Ayurveda. Our situation was such as touch and go even so, we were determined that, if our families would agree, we would marry soon, though it was not like a walk in the park. By the blessing of Almighty on **January 12, 2018**, Dr. Pandya married Rosy and she became the life and soul of my life.

“Shopping delights her; an easy-going approach to everything suits me. She is fastidious about her work, while I remain content with simplicity. She always asks why; I prefer to accept life with a quiet “I do not know why.” I love to dream; she gently brings me back to the reality that surrounds us. A fine artist blessed with beautiful calligraphy, while my mind wanders through the lanes of abstract thought. I wish to have everything in a moment; she believes in waiting for the right time and the right moment. I prefer to sleep early at night; she enjoys living through the night before surrendering to sleep. I say she is my dream; she smiles and says those dreams will one day be fulfilled.

So many opposites exist between us, and yet something unseen keeps drawing us toward one another, something we still fail to understand. With the passing of time, everything slowly became natural; incompatibility gently transformed

into compatibility. Gradually I began to grasp the glow of her radiance, where togetherness gives birth to a rainbow of quiet harmony. I felt the waves of her voice, where every melody seems to find its resting place. I felt the softness of her heart, such as a shy, half-soaked little kitten seeking warmth. I felt the warmth within her, where fierceness appears whenever the moment demands it. I sensed the child hidden deep inside, sometimes longing to be cared for like a little girl. I felt the colourful house of her mind, where **Nadia** and **Ruhaan** are cherished and played with in tender affection. I felt the silent pain resting in her heart, burdened by thoughts of the uncertain future. I felt the rhythm of a modern life, where faith quietly coexists with a changing generation. And **within that heart I discovered love, vast, deep and immeasurable alike the ocean itself.**

She was magnanimous, immaculate, finicky, precocious, garrulous and austere; while I remained vociferous, unkempt, prompt, taciturn and nebulous. **Complete opposites in nature, and yet somehow we moved together such as essential cogs within the great machine of life.** And somewhere within this journey lives a simple wish to spend a lifetime gallivanting across the world together, wandering through beautiful destinations and gathering moments that time itself cannot erase.”

Chapter 7

Dream Beyond the Boundary Line of Cricket

TIME: Between 2003-2006

*"If you don't have a dream, you can't push yourself.
You won't know what the target is."* **M.S. Dhoni**

(Inspirational quote from Global Indian.)

(The Middle Part: Between Dreams and Reality)

The Words That Shaped My Journey

When I was a child, youngest uncle on one occasion told me something very simple, yet very powerful. He said, "We become healthy when we eat even the smallest grain of rice on our plate, because each grain carries the blessings of Allah." He would smile and add playfully, "But those smallest blessed grains have a habit of jumping off the plate... so eat carefully."

At that age, I didn't question whether it was scientifically right or wrong. I didn't analyse it. I simply believed it. From that day on, I began eating mindfully, making sure not to waste even a single grain. **What started as a small childhood habit slowly became a lifelong value and gratitude.** As children, our hearts are soft, pure, and deeply impressionable. **A few gentle words, spoken with affection and wisdom, can shape our thoughts forever.** Advice given with care does more than correct behaviour; it builds character. It teaches respect, gratitude, discipline, and awareness without fear or force.

Looking back, I realise that the message was never just about rice. It was about appreciating what we have. It was about understanding that every blessing, no matter how small,

deserves respect. It was about mindfulness being present even in the smallest actions. There are many ways to guide a child, but the most powerful ones are those wrapped in positivism and warmth. When advice is given with kindness and meaning, it does not realise as a rule; it believe like a wisdom. And wisdom planted in a child's heart grows silently, beautifully, for lifetime. In some-moments only one loving sentence can do the change, the way a child sees the world and when that change is positive, it is alike a blessing far greater than we ever imagined.

Formerly, he also taught me how to cross the road. When crossing the road, one should look **“right first, then left and right once more”**.

Look Right first for immediate danger or challenge. In India, traffic comes from the right first, so your first glance is toward the most immediate risk. Look Left for broader perspective. Next, you check the left for traffic coming from the opposite direction. Look Right again to confirm and proceed carefully. One should double-check the nearest traffic before stepping forward.

In our daily life, our focus should first be on what is immediately in front of us, the challenges, risks, or responsibilities that demand attention. Ignoring them could lead to “collisions.” Only once we address the urgent, it's important to consider the bigger picture, other opportunities, relationships or consequences. Life isn't just about reacting; it's also about understanding context. Before taking a major step, confirm that your immediate environment is safe and favourable. Planning and caution reduce mistakes, even after you've assessed everything else.

The life's lesson of crossing a busy road is a balance of immediacy, perspective and verification. Focus on what demands your immediate attention, keep an eye on the broader consequences and double-check before committing to a decision. In short, my uncle taught me more than road safety; he was teaching me life's pathway.

Every person carries an aura, “an energy that reflects who they are”. The people you choose to spend span with don’t just share your space; they shape your thoughts, your mood, and your spirit. Energy is contagious. When you surround yourself with positive, kind, and motivated people, their light strengthens your own. They inspire you to grow, to believe and to grow better each day. So choose your circle wisely. Stay close to those who uplift you, encourage you, and bring out the best in you, because the right energy can transform your life. These lines were told by one of my favourite teacher, Dr Tikendrajit Sarma, my guide, my mentor.

One of the famous dialogues we used during our hotel life among friend circle was, **“If I believe I will, and then I definitely will.”** This line have great impact while facing a difficult task and helps to self-motivate.

Some of the famous dialogues from my high school teachers which touched my heart- “If you have any doubt from above or below, from the front or the back, or from the left or the right, clear it now only in class.” "There is no problem without a solution. Where there is a will, there is a way." "If you know the formula, you will be a master of the subject. But if you don’t know it, you will undergo completely lost and nervous during the exam and you will sense such as having loose motion."

I still remember an incident from our mathematics tuition classes. Two Santali boys studied with us, one sharp and quick to grasp, the other a little slow. Our teacher explained the topics in English to the brighter boy and then asked him to teach his friend in their **mother tongue**. The simple idea worked wonders. In teaching, the talented boy deepened his own understanding and his friend finally grasped the concepts. In the end, both of them passed with flying colours.

Beyond the Field: Cricket in our blood

As children, cricket was deeply embedded in our lives. We were often torn between pursuing a career in cricket and focusing on our studies. I look back on vividly how I used to collect stickers of Indian cricketers. I would stick them on my study table and the wooden almirah in my grandmother's room. But one day, my father removed all the stickers because daily prayer i.e. namaz is not allowed in that room where pictures of living being is present in front. He told me to focus on my studies instead of cricket. I was upset at that occasion but didn't dare to oppose him. Still the remnant of the stickers of players are present in the almirah as well as in my mind.

During my early school years, I wasn't particularly interested in academics. My father promised to buy me a bicycle if I became the class topper, which motivated me to burn the midnight oil for the exams. I passed and received the bicycle, which I used to ride to cricket practice, fueling my passion for the cricket even more.

My father worked alongside many scientists at the Agricultural Research Centre and often dreamed of me becoming a scientist. Whenever he had the chance, he would share stories about the lives of scientists, how they studied, the challenges they faced, and how they lived. He would also set little goals for me, such as promising new shoes if I performed well in class. These incentives helped motivate me to hitting the books. Though my father cherished watching me play cricket, he didn't believe in pursuing cricket as a career. Instead, he always encouraged me to focus on my studies.

Around this era, V.V.S. Laxman became my hero after his memorable innings against Australia. Since Laxman had been a medical student, I decided to carry on my studies more seriously and save cricket for the future. Thus, I took a conscious decision to focus on my academics, especially as the matriculation exams drew closer.

I began studying seriously, especially with the help of my friend Nehra. Together, we created an educational environment in our community. Even though our school was a non-institutional private school, meaning our teachers were not paid, they were incredibly dedicated. Since we had bonded with them through our shared love for cricket, they supported us as we managed to shift our interest from cricket to academics. Teachers such as Aminur, Moinul, Debnath, Mozammel, Bhyuan, Ahmed and Hamid Sir invested a lot of times in us. After school, we would discuss class notes and help each other understand difficult topics. Mozammel sir, our B.Sc. teacher, often shared motivational stories to inspire us. Moinul sir actually my uncle taught us science, which shaped me particularly interested in mathematics and science. Aminur sir was an erudite teacher, who had umpired our cricket matches before, taught us English grammar and fashioned it interesting by using cricket examples, such as: “I played cricket,” “I am playing cricket,” and “I will play cricket.” This approach helped to understand grammar more relatable and engaging. By the interval matriculation exams came and I had passed with decent marks and was admitted to the science stream. Previously a boy who preferred cricket over studies, had now helped the shift to academics and thanks to the constant support of my family, teachers and friends. In cricketing language I hit the spot by shifting my mind from hitting ball with bat to hitting the books. If we don't know when to brake and take turn then it will break us in personal progress. Everyone's choice of quest is different so path is also unique.

Unwritten Chapters: Life in Higher Secondary

I have mentioned cricket has always been my passion and primary hobby until class seven and was more interested in playing than studying. My roll number in class seven was 34 out of 53 students at Bhomrabil M.E. School. However, things started to change when my family began stressing the

importance of education. My father had not been able to pursue higher studies due to the struggles he had faced in the past. He was the eldest son and had worked at a wood cutting factory while studying. Later, he secured a fourth-grade job at the Assam Agricultural University, but he had to leave his education to support the family. He often expressed regret over not completing his studies and understood the value of education. He would tell me, **“Study properly and one day you will be a scientist.”**

It was then that I realised that by focusing on my studies, I could make my father proud, and he would allow me to continue playing cricket. After all, he admired watching me play the cricket. This realisation gave me the drive to improve my academic performance. When I passed the 8th standard and ranked 4th in my class, it marked a turning point. People began to notice that I was excelling in both studies and cricket. Those who had previously criticised me for spending too much period playing cricket now spoke to me with respect. This shift in perception gave me a surge of positive energy and confidence, which motivated me even more.

When I completed my 9th standard, my rank improved to 2nd. When I received my HSLC results, I passed with top-rate marks, which led me to decide to pursue the science stream. I joined B.N. College, Dhubri. Until my HSLC results were announced, I wasn't sure whether to study biology or stick to mathematics, as I had been exceptional at it. I chose biology as my 6th subject, while opting for other subjects as my main courses. However this 6th subject decided my future in medical field.

At the most crucial moment of my life, just before the matriculation examination, an unexpected moment touched my heart. Among the students from another school was a intelligent girl who had been the topper of her class since Class V. We had once studied in the same school during her days from Class V to VII. In those years, she hardly noticed

me. I was only a careless backbencher, a boy who disliked studies, while toppers usually looked past, boys like me.

But when I began to study seriously and slowly became her competitor in the race of marks, something changed. One day she proposed to me. Her words surprised me. I could not understand whether it was true affection or just a distraction at the most sensitive time of my life. Gently, I told her that my heart already belonged to someone else which I told to divert her from me. After that, she stepped back silently.

I never knew what she truly felt, but I knew one thing clearly, my dream was waiting for me. My books, my future and my determination were stronger than the sudden pull of emotion. In that moment, competition saved me from taking a wrong path at the wrong time and I realized that a clear dream is the strongest guard of a young heart

When I moved to Dhubri, I stayed at a relative's place for a few days until a excellent private mess or hostel was met. At that era, government hostel conditions were very poor. My father advised me to discuss with my classmates and decide which mess would be the best. B.N. College had two sessions, each with more than 500 students. During one class, I noticed two boys sitting at the front who seemed to be serious and focused on their studies, one was short while the other one taller comparable to "Baremiya and Chotemiya" (Amitabh Bachchan and Govinda). After class, I decided to talk to them, but they were walking so fast that I had to run to catch up. I asked for their names, where they were staying and if there were any vacant rooms. They told me that only science students were allowed in their hostel, and it had a capacity of nine, with one room still available. I went to the hostel and saw that it had three large rooms with two beds each, two small single rooms, and one medium-sized room at the back. It was a bit crowded, but I decided to adjust if my roommate agreed. I didn't want to stay with non-science steam students, as I feared I would get distracted from my studies and be

drawn into extracurricular activities. My roommate agreed, and we became part of the ten students living at Sahara Hostel, Dhubri.

The Professional path from Cricket to Career

Among the ten borders in our hostel, four were seniors, and the six of us newcomers were like a mini team of characters from a movie. Neelu, the "**Govinda**" of our hostel was a huge fan of Salman Khan and his chest was as broad as the Bollywood stars. He would often sing Salman's movie songs, and I can still hear his voice echoing through our hostel halls. Kabir, the "**Amitabh Bachchan**" of our hostel, was the tallest among us, a true giant in both stature and spirit. Then there was Mohit, affectionately known as "**Bottle**" because he would sit at his study table for hours, unrelenting in his pursuit of knowledge. Ashish was our "**Rockstar**," always the life of the group, while Ashraful- most gentle and funny, my roommate, was always by my side when I was in need. Together, we were more than just a group of hostel mates; we had a convivial relation as a family.

Our new hostel life was exciting, full of challenges and learning, but beneath it all, we were warriors fighting in a competitive world. One evening, they asked me where I was from, and I proudly told them, "Serfanguri No. 2 village, Gossaigaon." The way they struggled to pronounce my village's name became a source of constant teasing, but it was all in delightful fun. It became a routine for us-class, tuition, market and cricket. We all impassioned playing cricket and on weekends or evenings we practised despite the lack of a proper field. The small area in front of the hostel served as our cricket ground.

As much as we were passionate about cricket, our focus shifted to our studies as exams approached. Study sessions were intense, and competition crept into every corner of our lives. We became experts at hiding our study habits. The

lights would be off after 11 pm with only table lamps glowing as we tried to study in silence, pretending to be asleep. "Bottle" was the most diligent among us, spending hours in his study zone, a testament to his relentless work ethic. That's how he earned his nickname.

Life in the hostel wasn't just about studies. It was also about sharing, supporting each other and learning together. Whenever anyone's guardian brought food, we'd share it. I recall, Neelu's brother would bring curd and milk products for us twice a month, and we'd sit in line, devouring the treats together. Kabir, always hungry, would sneak into other rooms to raid their snacks, biscuits, horlicks, even multivitamin syrup, he took them all without asking. So, we had to hide our food in trunks to keep it safe from his wandering hands.

One day, I decided to teach Kabir a moral. I filled a horlicks container with Indian frankincense resin powder (locally known *dhuna* powder) that resembled the colour of the horlicks powder and gave it to baffle him. When he unsuspectingly started licking it without mixing with water, he quickly realised something was wrong. The look on his face was priceless, and from that day on, he stopped taking food from others without asking. It was a small prank but it taught him to respect others belongings.

In 2004, we joined the MEET coaching centre, where our teachers designed learning fun and engaging. Chakraborty and Roy sir, were exceptional chemistry teachers. Our physics teacher Rahman sir, had an unusual way of teaching. He would ask if we had any doubts and then he'd point in every direction—left, right, front, back and even upward or downward. It was his way of ensuring we understood every angle of the subject. In mathematics, we had Bordoloi sir, a gold medalist, whose teaching was a mix of genius and humour.

After class, we would race back to the hostel, trying to beat each others speed with Kabir always winning. When our 11th-grade final exams came, I discovered a new passion for

biology and decided to drop mathematics as my fifth subject. My efforts paid off when I received an A grade, along with two other students. The teachers showered me with praise, even used my picture in their advertisements. But the success created a rift among us. The competitive mindset that had driven us to study harder but now created distance between us even though we were previously so closed.

When the 12th standard arrived, our competitive drive was in full force. We were studying in secret, each of us hiding our notes from the others. When the results came, we all succeeded with first division, but the bond between us had weakened. The competition for success had taken its toll on our friendship.

After leaving the hostel, we all focused on preparing for the entrance exams. Three of us aimed for medical school, while others tried different paths. I was fortunate to qualify for BAMS in 2007 and was admitted to the Government Ayurvedic College in Guwahati. Ashish pursued a BDS course outside Assam, while the others decided to try again for the medical entrance exams. The pressure was immense. They sacrificed a year of their lives preparing, but despite their efforts, they didn't succeed.

However, their determination paid off in 2009 when Neelu and Kabir finally secured seats in the MBBS program and now Neelu is working in a Government Hospital as senior Medical officer, Kabir is doing M.D. in Psychiatry, Ashish completed BDS. It was a bitter sweet moment for Mohit, who had better ranks but did not attend the counselling session, thinking he wouldn't get the seat. The situation was tense, as Mohit's frustration led to personal challenges, but he persevered. His mental strength and strenuous work on the fourth attempt helped him secure his place in MBBS and now is doing M.D. in Padiatrics.

From the 10 borders, seven of us became doctors, while the other three pursued different careers. Despite our individual achievements, the lack of communication between us became

more apparent. The competitive spirit had distanced us in a way that we hadn't anticipated. But as I reflect on those days, I realised that the lessons we learned from cricket, teamwork, perseverance and competition, have shaped us into the people we are today.

The Great Rooftop Pipe Accident.

One evening, as usual, our little gang climbed up to the rooftop of Professor Basir Sir's building. The rooftop was our unofficial "**evening club**." We reached there by sneaking through our hostel owner's house and spent about half an hour every day laughing, sharing jokes, and trying to outdo each other in making the others laugh. That day the laughter was flowing freely when suddenly one of our friends, in a heroic attempt to change his sitting position, stepped right on the water pipe with the full confidence and full body weight. The poor pipe surrendered immediately and water began leaking like a tiny fountain. For a few seconds we all stared at it such as scientists observing a new discovery. Then panic arrived. Instead of fixing the pipe (which none of us had the talent for), we decided to fix the situation by quietly disappearing. Within seconds the rooftop looked as innocent as a meditation hall.

About an hour later, Basir Sir discovered the mysterious water leak and rushed to the rooftop. Soon his thunderous voice echoed through the building: "Who did this?" We heard the angry investigation from our rooms but maintained the silence of saints who had taken a vow of non-confession. Eventually, Sir called a mechanic and the pipe was repaired. The case was closed... though among us it remained famous as "**The great rooftop pipe accident.**"

Chapter 8

The Plan for Reunion of the School Team

“A cricket team’s captain may or may not play very well, but he gives top-notch advice because the responsibility of the entire team rests on him.

That’s how it is sometimes even the captain makes mistakes.”

(Quote dedicated to Ashish Nehra of our Team.)

“I live in the present with an eye on the future”. MS Dhoni (

Inspirational quote from Social Media)

The Unfinished Chapter: Life Goes On

Beyond Boundaries: Childhood Cricket Team Reunion

Success in cricket, as in life, rarely arrives by chance; it grows quietly from a set of guiding values. **Clarity** provides direction and purpose, helping us focus our energy on what truly matters. **Consistency** transforms small daily efforts into long-term mastery, while **courage** allows us to confront fear and step forward despite uncertainty. **Commitment** keeps us moving even when progress seems slow and **character** forms the moral foundation that earns lasting respect. **Communication** connects people, strengthens teams, and inspires shared progress, while **creativity** helps us discover new solutions when challenges arise. Finally, contribution reminds us that true success lies not merely in personal achievement but also in uplifting others. Together, these values shape both excellence on the cricket field and meaning in the competitive journey of life.

Cricket was in my father's blood, and naturally it flowed in mine as well. Despite the pressures of academics, I always found time to play the sports I loved. In 2010, while studying medical science at GACH in Guwahati, I reconnected with some old friends from different teams with whom we had competed during our childhood cricket days. Though we were now students in different colleges across the city, we shared one thing in common, the longing to play together again.

Finding time during the day was nearly impossible because of our busy schedules, so we decided to participate in a night tournament, a Super Six tennis-ball tournament at the Hatigaon playground. It was far removed from the hard red-ball matches we had played as teenagers, and most of us had not held a bat for years. Yet, despite the odds, we played remarkably well. We won several matches and reached the semi-finals.

For that match, we even invited our childhood Shane Watson, Bappu from our self-proclaimed Australia-inspired team. Unfortunately, we lost the match. **But that night was never about winning or losing; it was about reliving our memories.** After the match, we sat together and reminisced about those beautiful, cricket-crazy days of our youth.

Soon reality caught up with us again, examinations, career plans, and growing responsibilities. Cricket slowly slipped into the background. These days I mostly play cricket on my mobile phone or derive quiet gratification from watching matches on television. I follow every format, whether India is playing or not, and I cherish tournaments such as the IPL, BPL, and LPL. My obsession with cricket often keeps me glued to the television, which once prompted my wife to joke, **“You’ve turned the bedroom into a stadium.”**

I smiled and replied, **“This is our stadium. I’m Dhoni, and you’re my Sakshi.”**

Cricket taught me far more than mere entertainment; it became a philosophy of life. Just like cricket, family life requires teamwork, trust, communication, and a healthy environment to flourish. It teaches discipline, the courage to learn from mistakes, and the wisdom to seize the moment because, **just like cricket, life does not always offer a second chance.** Above all, it teaches us that humanity is the greatest religion and friendship the truest relationship.

Later, Aman and I began planning a proper reunion of players from our three childhood teams. We were close to most of the players and knew them well. But as we tried to reach out, we realized that nearly everyone was occupied with careers and personal responsibilities. Many of our teammates were now serving the country in different roles especially in the defence services. It dawned upon us that **cricket had not spoiled our futures as some of our parents once feared but had instead shaped us.**

Here's a brief look at the current lives of our friends from **the Palashguri team.**

Manzur Ilahi completed his Master's from Aligarh Muslim University and now runs a coaching centre and an internet business in Guwahati.

Mahfizur is an advocate at Gossaigaon Sub-Divisional Court and is active in social work and politically active.

Selim is a Government school teacher serving society.

Nasir is now an Government officer in the Indian Army.

Zahid Iqbal completed his M.Tech and works as a college professor.

Zianur practices law at the Guwahati High Court, Guwahati.

Moksadul is a botany lecturer at Gossaigaon Science College.

Players from the **Telipara team** have also flourish great strides as human beings.

Monnaf is now in the National Security Guard providing defence to the Ministers of India.

Biju is a senior Army officer under the Government of India.

Bijoy Saha serves in the CRPF under the Government of India.

Ratan works at an Airtel office at home town, Gossaigaon.

Mantu Saha is Government employed at a Regional Agricultural Research Station.

Tinku has a own big shop, and Ranjan works as a manager at an NRL petrol pump.

Present status of our own **Bhomrabil** teammates.

Haradhan and Rezaul run a computer coaching centre of their own.

Nilup is a Government teacher under the Government of Assam.

Bupul serves in the BSF under the Government of India.

Mithun is working as a mathematics teacher in a Government high school.

Dipon works with the Assam Police under the Government of Assam.

Rofiqul serves as the village chief and is also employed at a brick company.

Aman is a PWD engineer under the Government of Assam.

Dhoni of our team, doctor by profession and I am currently working as an assistant professor in an Ayurvedic Medical College.

In the preface, I mentioned my nephew who reminds me very much of my own childhood. From the tender age of two, he developed a deep passion for cricket. Even after securing admission to an engineering college, his love for the game never faded. Eventually, he chose to follow his heart, leaving engineering to join a cricket coaching centre at Latashil Playground while pursuing a B.Sc. at B. Baruah College nearby. Sometimes destiny writes its own story in our lives, and we simply have to trust it. Around that time, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill for nearly two years. With playgrounds closed and life momentarily paused, he gradually shifted his focus from cricket to academics. With dedication and perseverance, he successfully completed his graduation. Later, he cleared the APSC prelims on his very first attempt and also secured a government job on his first attempt. **For us, cricket was never merely a game; it was a school of life.** In fact, outdoor games possess a quiet power that, at some point in our lives, guides us along our journey.

I must confess one truth from my childhood. **I could not succeed on my first attempt in class seven.** Until that point in time, studies had never been my priority. **My entire world revolved around cricket.** From morning to evening, my only dream was to become a cricketer, and everything else seemed insignificant. When the result came and I realized that I had not succeeded, it felt as if the ground beneath my feet had suddenly disappeared. In a moment of frustration and anger, I struck the wall of our house with a stick again and again. That moment of rage however slowly turned into a moment of realization. Standing there, breathless and exhausted, I understood something for the first time in my life; even to become a cricketer, education was necessary. Around that phase of life, I began to draw inspiration from

players like V. V. S. Laxman, who was a medical student before becoming a great cricketer. His journey of self-discovery made me realize that **sports and education did not have to stand against each other; rather they could walk together.**

But here I want to make one thing clear: I do not believe that becoming a doctor, an engineer, an officer, a teacher, or even a national player alone defines success. Without humanity, compassion, and moral values, no profession can truly be called successful.

I mention our present positions and achievements not to boast, but to remind ourselves of where we came from, to honour the soil that shaped our childhood and held us together when everything else seemed to fall apart. Our early years were fragile and filled with challenges, shaped by turbulence, uncertainty and a quiet resilience we did not even realize we were building. Communal violence cast dark shadows over our villages. Fear was not abstract; it lived among us, in whispers, in silence, in the guarded way people looked at one another. At the same time, the Brahmaputra's devastating floods returned again and again, uprooting families, swallowing homes and wiping away livelihoods as if they had never existed. Education was scarce, communication weak and medical care almost nonexistent. Death became familiar; Malaria, snake bites, maternal deaths and child loss were part of everyday life. Alongside these visible struggles were the silent ones, unspoken mental burdens hidden behind tired faces and through it all, poverty remained constant. Many families, including ours were displaced by the river. We were not just moving, we were losing, repeatedly. Migration was not a choice but a necessity for survival and growing communal tensions added to the uncertainty, as people feared losing not only their homes but their sense of identity. These realities shaped us. They influenced our decisions, redirected our paths and redefined our dreams. Cricket, once our greatest joy and escape, slowly gave way to more urgent

needs. Not because we stopped loving it but because life demanded stability, security and dignity. The pull of survival became stronger than the passion of the game. Life did not ask what we wanted, it demanded what we needed. One by one, we stepped away from the field and chose paths that could offer us a more certain future. That is why our story matters.

It is not just about cricket or careers but about growing up amid floods, fear and poverty and still finding the courage to dream. It is a story of growth, resilience and friendships that endured, even as life led us in different directions. If there is one lesson life taught us, it is this; knowing when to change your goal is not weakness, it is wisdom. Dreams may not always be within reach, but if you aim high enough, you may still reach something greater than you imagined. That is only possible if you are willing to adjust your path along the way.

There are countless stars in the sky, but only one moon. In the same way, each of us has our own path, our own place, our own journey. Even if you shine for others, in your own life you are the center of your universe. True success lies not in becoming someone else but in becoming your best self quietly, courageously and with purpose.

Reflecting on all this, Nehra (Aman) and I realized that cricket had not ruined our lives; in fact, it had prepared us for them. Every player had managed to adapt, survive, and thrive in his own way. Most importantly, many are now serving the nation with pride. Cricket taught us to look beyond religion and caste, to embrace friendship, and to compete with a positive mindset. That evening we concluded that a grand reunion was not possible at this stage of life. We decided to postpone it and perhaps revisit the idea when we are older. Everything had gradually fallen beautifully into place for the reunion. After years of distance, the idea of meeting again had begun to feel real, almost within reach. The conversations were warm, the excitement was growing and for the first time

in a long while it felt as though **the moments were gently preparing to return something precious to us** and then fate intervened.

Just a few days later my phone rang. It was Aman, our Nehra. There was a tremor in his voice that I had never heard before. His father had been admitted to the hospital after suffering severe chest pain. The situation sounded critical. Instinctively, I tried to remain composed. I advised him about the immediate treatment protocols and urged him to leave without delay. Every passing moment mattered. He rushed to catch the train, holding on to hope, the fragile hope that he would reach in time. But destiny had already written its cruel conclusion. Before Aman could even reach the hospital, his father breathed his last at 7:40 p.m. in March 2020. **His life was claimed by a sudden heart attack.** Late that night, at 11:20 p.m., my phone buzzed again. It was a message from Aman. Short, yet devastating: “My sister is no more.” I tried calling him immediately, but there was no response. Silence, the heaviest silence, filled the space between us.

With a sinking heart I called Dipon-the Munna Patel of our team, hoping for some clarity, perhaps some strength in shared grief. But what he told me next shattered whatever composure I had left. The tragedy had not ended there. Back at home, Aman’s sister had been alone when she received the news of their father’s sudden passing. The shock was too overwhelming, too brutal for her tender heart to bear. In a moment of unbearable despair, consumed by grief and loneliness, she stepped outside and attempted to end her life by hanging herself from a tree near their house. By the time she was found and rushed to the hospital, it was too late. She was declared dead on the same hospital bed where her father had been declared lifeless just hours earlier. In a single evening that home had lost its pillars, a father and a sister, to grief’s merciless storm.

Words fall short before such sorrow. It was not merely a loss; it was a silence that echoed through hearts, a darkness that no explanation could soften. **Some tragedies do not ask for reason. They simply arrive, unannounced and change everything forever**

Life today moves at great speed, much like cricket evolving from Test matches to ODIs, T-20, T-10 and even shorter formats. Yet true cricketers still believe that Test cricket is the real measure of a player's character. In the same way, the real success of life is not like a quick T-20 victory but like a long Test match, where patience, discipline and endurance are constantly tested.

Life demands the qualities of a great Test batsman. We must face challenges with patience and deep concentration, maintaining focus step by step, just as **Rahul Dravid** stood firm at the crease for hours. Good judgment, like a batsman's shot selection, teaches us which opportunities to embrace and which distractions to leave outside our limits. Balance, resilience and calmness help us survive the swing and spin of life's difficulties. To achieve meaningful success, we must also learn to build long innings with stamina and discipline, much like **Sachin Tendulkar**, who shaped his greatness through patience and dedication. At the same time, life requires the qualities of a Test bowler such as consistency, planning, and endurance. Just as **James Anderson** builds pressure through accurate and persistent bowling, success in life often comes after long spells of steady effort.

Ultimately life like Test cricket demands patience, persistence, strategy and adaptability. Conditions may change, challenges may swing or spin unexpectedly, but those who remain disciplined, thoughtful and resilient will eventually reach their goal.

As kids, each of us dreamed of becoming big players like Dhoni, Hardik, Yuvraj, Afridi or Sangakkara. But life took us down different paths, most of them far from cricket. Millions of children around the world share similar dreams of playing for their country but only a few make it happen. **Still, the game gives something valuable to everyone who plays it.**

It gives us mental strength, resilience and the spirit to fight fairly. We all miss those cricket days, but we have adapted to our responsibilities.

Our lives, though full of success, are also filled with personal sacrifices and struggles. The years of competition and striving for success had compelled us to forget the importance of being there for each other. In the end, the real lesson was that life is not just about winning; it is about supporting each other, sharing victories and losses and **understanding that the journey is as important as the destination.**

Though we all went on to lead different lives, serving in various professions like the army, teaching and practising law, cricket remains deeply rooted in the hearts of millions like us. It has taught us learning experiences about health, fighting spirit, and friendship. We may no longer play together, but the memories of our childhood matches, the lessons we learned on the field and the bonds we formed will always remain a part of who we are.

Now, years later, when I watch cricket matches, I reminisce about those days with a sense of nostalgia. I may never have been selected as an international player, but the experiences cricket taught me will stay with me throughout my life. Life and cricket are full of ups and downs, victories and defeats. But **what matters most is how we play the game** and how we treat each other when the final whistle blows.

In our area, a cricket club was later formed in the name of Dhoni—the **MSD Club**, under which big cricket tournaments are arranged every year.

If we can maintain each stanza of life, love and career with the right perspective, we get to taste its nectar. If we have a positive perspective on the world as it truly is, the prospects for a better future improve. With the hope of meeting you all again in the next inning, let us remain happy in every situation, whether at the two poles of the Earth.

The North and South Poles are mysterious and beautiful parts of the Earth, covered with vast ice and snow. In these silent, frozen lands, nature reveals its raw power through icy winds, glowing auroras, and endless white landscapes. Though harsh and cold, the poles hold a unique charm and purity that few places on Earth possess. They remind us of the planet's fragile beauty and the peaceful balance that exists in nature's most extreme environments.
