

MAGADA'S
Expeditions of Life

T h e A r a b i a n S e a

"If you Know me, You Can't
be a PESSIMIST"



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**“Dedicated to my wife Rekha, son Reshi Magada, my
source of inspiration ‘Gangamma’ —my mother and all my
Fishcos¹”**

¹ All the alumni from the College of Fisheries, Mangalore, India are collectively known as ‘Fishcos’

Explore the Treasures of Life with Me...

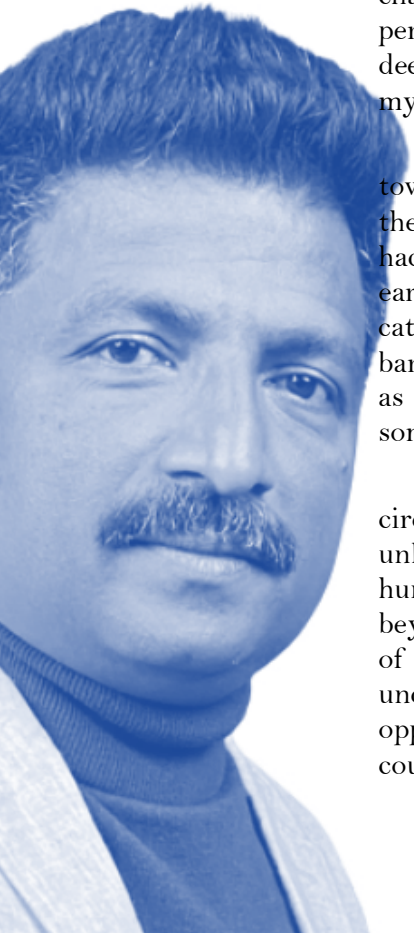
The Anchor



I realize that 'Arabian Sea' might seem like an ambitious title for my story, but I chose it for a reason. The vast expanse of the Arabian Sea, with its unpredictable waves, endless horizons, and constant interplay of tides and currents, mirrors the complexities of my own journey. The story of all seas may be the same, but I chose this one because I've lived alongside it. Just like the sea, with its turbulence on the surface and calm depths below, my life has been a blend of visible challenges and quiet internal battles. The sea's persistent rhythm, its unyielding energy, and the deep stillness beneath it all, resonate deeply with my own experiences.

I was born into a life of scarcity, in a small town where dreams often seemed to dissolve in the heat of the sun. My family, one of the poorest, had little to offer in terms of material wealth. My early days were spent as a cowboy, tending to cattle, navigating fields that often appeared as barren as the future ahead of me. But even then, as I walked those dusty paths, I knew there was something beyond what my eyes could see.

From the start, I wasn't content to let my circumstances define me. I had a thirst for unknown treasure may be the knowledge, a hunger for the unknown happiness. What lay beyond the horizon? What lay within the depths of the ocean? Little by little, I began to understand that life, much like the sea, offered opportunities for exploration if one had the courage to dive in.



It wasn't an easy journey. I faced failure quite often—so many times that it felt like failure was my constant companion. But with every setback, I learned. I learned to rise, to adapt, to look forward with hope. My victories may have been modest at times, but each one was a step further in my quest, a testament to my belief that life is not meant to be easy. It is meant to be lived with intention.

I did not write this biography with the ambition of inspiring an entire generation. Instead, it is dedicated to the rural children and youths who find themselves trapped in the struggles of life, unable to dream big due to the weight of their circumstances. Biographies, after all, often begin with tales of hardship. I have yet to read one that starts with unbroken success and smooth sailing. Struggles are the common thread, and it is through these trials that true realization dawns.

If you possess knowledge and understanding from the very beginning, it's merely 'basic knowledge,' an inherited understanding of life's workings. But the realization that comes after enduring hardship—that's the kind of wisdom that stays with you forever. It is forged through experience, through the pain and triumph of overcoming obstacles. The lessons learned in the face of adversity have a profound and lasting impact. They transform us, grounding us in a deeper sense of purpose.

This biography is not meant for those who have had everything handed to them, but for the ones who have fought tooth and nail to make something of themselves, for those who dream despite their struggles. It's a reminder that while the path may be tough, the wisdom and realization you gain along the way are what will shape your destiny. It's not about where you start, but how you rise through the challenges that defines your story.

"If you know me, you can't be a pessimist." That's something I have come to realize over time and trying to convey the same to the entire world. My life has been a mixture of highs and lows, lows and losses, but through it all, I have remained optimistic, not because I have been untouched by hardship, but because I understand that 'I should be in the process of winning without bothering the end

results. Without it, we cannot grow, we cannot discover who we really are.

As a fisheries professional with over three decades of academic experience as a Professor of Aquatic Biology, my journey through the ‘Arabian Sea’ was far more than an exploration of the ocean—it became a journey through life itself. The sea taught me lessons I could never have found elsewhere. Its waves carried wisdom, its depths revealed the beauty of the unknown, and its storms reminded me of the strength found in resilience. This is my story, a cowboy from a small town who journeyed far beyond the fields of his youth to uncover the mysteries of the sea and the profound depths of life. I extend my gratitude to everyone who was part of this journey in the ‘Arabian Sea.’ A special thanks to Mr. Jayaraj Swaminathan and the team from the ‘Bay of Bengal Program-IGO’ for allowing me to use their artwork in my novel.

The duo who have penned the preface are my juniors from college, and I’ve had the pleasure of knowing them for the past 35 years. Though our choices and tastes in life may differ, we are beautifully united by a shared love for music and a similar philosophy towards life. Perhaps that’s why they were the perfect voices to introduce this work. What they’ve written reflects their honest perception—and I found myself in complete agreement. I saw no need to change a single word. Now, I invite you to sail through the Arabian Sea...

— Dr Shivakumar **Magada**, Mangalore, India

20.05.2025 (56th Year Birthday)

Preface

Some stories are not just written but are narrated with such genuineness that they have the power of resonating and connecting with generations like waves relentlessly hit upon the shore. Arabian Sea: Autobiography of Magada is one such journey. A tale shared with a purpose.

Wherever Magada stands, the place becomes a stage and seems to shift around him, with his presence as commanding as mother nature! He walks his path in his own style without fearing that it can often stir the waters of controversy!

He doesn't listen much because he is certain that when he speaks, knowledge is shaped, sharpened and shared, like the sea carving the coastlines with its own rhythm. A salesman by instinct, a government man by fate (and perhaps by marriage), his journey is anything but ordinary. He is not lazy as he often drifts by in pursuits, others may not understand, like penning down this autobiography!

In these reflections, lies something precious: a voice daring to make sense of the chaos!

He is an optimist, though in life's tight corners, he sometimes trembles like a leaf as this process has nobility that reveals a man who feels deeply, especially for those he calls family. He may know their flaws, yet he chooses love over logic!

Magada is drawn to those who rise from the shadows—the underdogs, the unheard. He lends a hand where it matters most, though often the heights above him stay silent in return. He has a magnetism for greatness—not always in achievement, but in connection. Fame, to him, is not worshipped—it is approached, greeted, sometimes questioned.

To read this book is to encounter contradictions, courage, and deep human values of realism, though flawed, always searching, and somehow still standing!

Let this be more than just a casual read. Let it be a calling.

—**Pradeep Haniya aka Subbi**, Founder Director,
Innosolv Consultancy Service Pvt. Ltd.

—**Ashoka S.**, Director, Ecomolt Pvt. Ltd.



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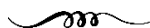
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*“If you want to really remember something, make an effort to forget it—
Magada”*



Wave 01

Fishplate

It was a small town nestled beside the Shimsha River, one of the tributaries of the Cauvery— a major river in southern India. My bungalow stood near the Shivapura railway station. The house, once a godown used by the British to store railway construction materials, was marked by large, high-pillared structures with tiled roofs. Two similar buildings nearby housed two families including ours. The property was expansive, enclosed by a wall and fence, with a deep well and a unique lavatory that none of the other residents had at that time. The ample space around the house was used to grow a variety of crops, including vegetables, papaya, banana, black gram, pomegranate, drumstick, flowers, and much more.

I had three older brothers and a sister who was married and lived in another town, along with my aunt's daughter Varalakshmi who stayed with us, and of course, my parents. During the summer, many guests from the village would visit and stay with us for extended periods. We would all go down to the riverbed to graze the cattle, where the farmers grew watermelon, cucumber, groundnuts, and more, which became our snacks and lunch. The thrill of sneaking fruits without getting caught everyday was unforgettable. We would also bathe in the river alongside the cattle, enjoying the simplicity of poverty of those times.

We grew up surrounded by nature, playing with animals like dogs, goats, jackals, mongooses, birds like fowls, eagles, sparrows, parrots, pigeons, owl, vultures, small creatures like honeybees, centipedes, cockroaches, ants, dragonflies, earthworms, chameleons, frogs, snails, lizards, *tigane*-blood bugs, and even the *henu/koore*-tiny lice that lived in our hair and clothes. My connection to the natural world extended to the rich variety of plants, from the smallest bryophytes to shrubs and towering wild trees, along with the birds that made their homes among them. A Nepalese family lived beside us. One Eshwar Singh who was my elder brother's age group was great designer of caterpillar and used to hunt birds efficiently. Catching chameleons with a coconut leaf stick as a threat was a great fun. Creating a cork ball from the fruits of the rain tree was a brilliant invention. Nature wasn't just a backdrop—it was woven into the very fabric of our lives, teaching us its wisdom through every encounter.

We had our own natural jacuzzi, mud baths, and sand baths, all for free. We made our own version of mineral water by digging small depressions in the sand, allowing clean water to seep through, which we then drank directly, just like animals. On the way back, we would carry buckets of cow dung to make cow dung cakes, which were one of the primary sources of energy. My brother would always gather twigs to bring home, but I was a bit lazy and often tried to avoid the work, only to get caught and punished by my mother. Both railway and road bridges spanned the river, and many times we would walk along the railway tracks. There were jamun trees lining the tracks, and we'd collect the fruits that had fallen onto the stones, as they never got dirty. Many years later, I discovered that the tracks were often soiled by train toilet drains, something we never realized as children.

Along the way, we would gather all sorts of wild fruits like *kaadu hunase* (Jungle tamarind, Monkey pod, Manila tamarind), *byalada hannu* (Wood Apple), *hunase hannu* (Tamarind), sugarcane, *ankole hannu* (Alangium), *guppatte hannu* (Cape Gooseberry), *ganake hannu* (Black Nighshade), *kaare hannu* (Carandas Plum), jackfruits and even collect eggs from wild birds (Quail) and honey. *Roasting jackfruit*

seeds, crabs, and quail eggs over a fire and savouring them was an exciting adventure. These were delicacies that probably 90% of the world isn't even aware are edible. During the summers, when nothing else was available, we even ate lantana berries. Buying fruits was unheard of. One of my brothers, Siddaraju who later became an engineer, was an expert at finding these fruits. He was also skilled at catching fish using a sickle, cutting eels cleanly in one swift motion. Using a sickle in water required precision, as the different density could cause it to deflect, risking injury. *He had an excellent sense of space and measurements. Once, he designed the entire school building using cartons. This natural intuition made him a highly efficient civil engineer.* At times, we would catch crabs from freshly planted paddy fields or gather weed fish with a towel or net. My connection to fish and aquatic life began in those early years, though I had no idea that one day I would find myself studying fisheries by the Arabian Sea.

My childhood was incredibly special, thanks to the unique place we lived in. Right next to our house was Shivapura² railway station, a village known for its historical significance—Mohan Chandra Karamchand Gandhi, the father of our nation, visited here during his freedom rally in the 1938. The station itself was a wonder to me, with mango, jamun, and guava trees scattered around, and a water chiller providing cool relief. There was also a Higginbotham's bookstore where I loved picking up cartoon and other unsold books.

I often visited the station to watch the steam engines. The train drivers would exchange wooden rings—known as 'Token Rings' with the station masters, and the engines would stop to refill water. I was always fascinated by the sight of the roaring fire inside the engine, where workers would shovel coal into the furnace. We'd sometimes take buckets to collect boiling water, and occasionally, we'd bathe right there. I loved the smell of coal, steam, and the overall atmosphere of the station.

Seeing new people in colourful clothes always made me happy, and the station buzzed with vendors selling groundnuts, coconuts,

² This town is known for Satyagraha Movement during India's national freedom fight. A great history was made on 26th April, 1938 at Shivapura.

and vadas—a unique snack that originated from the small Hotel Hebbar at the station, sold for just Rs. 0.20 a piece back then. The Hebbar family from Kundapur had moved to our village long ago and lived next door to us. Their children—Nagaraj, Ravi, and Prakash—were very close to our family and often gave us broken pieces of vada for free. Prakash, who was about 6-7 years older than me, even taught me to eat the fruits of the curry leaves plant. Their vadas were so famous that even cinema stars would stop by the hotel just to enjoy them. Today, they have established a large hotel and continue to be renowned for what is now known as "*Maddur Vada*."

As kids, we used to believe that there were people living inside the radio and cinema screens. But seeing the movie stars in person at Hebbar Hotel opened my eyes to a bigger world and sparked my dreams. My notebooks quickly filled up with their autographs. With the same enthusiasm, when I was in the fourth standard, there was a selection for a school drama during the annual day. I eagerly raised my hand, expressing my interest in acting. To my surprise, everyone, including our teacher Gururajulu Mestru (Gururajulu being his name, and "*Mestru*" meaning teacher), laughed at me. I was given the role of Ekalavya, a character from a mythological story—a tribal boy who gave his thumb as a gift to his guru, Dronacharya. The teacher openly said that I fit the role because of my skin colour and thin frame. Venkatesha did Dronacharya role. Although I didn't fully understand the implications of what was said at the time, my sharp memory has preserved every detail of that experience. I am still in touch with Datta, Prasadi, Ramachandra, Malathi and few others. Nearly two decades later, I returned to the same school as a guest and shared the story of my Ekalavya role, encouraging the students to step up, take the stage, and create opportunities for themselves.

Most of my leisure time was spent on the Shivapura railway station. Some passengers would drink coconut water and toss the shells aside, and after the train left, I'd eat the remaining pulp. My brother, although he rarely ate it, would insist that I collect those coconuts to dry them to use them as feedstock for cooking. One some random day, I was walking on the track. I used to keep the caps of Torino—one of the popular soft drinks of those times on the track and

see it getting flatten. I saw eight inch an iron piece—referred a ‘Fish Plate’ *in the railway language* which was used as locking mechanism for the rail track. It used to be there for every 10 feet. Due to the movement of heavy train, they used to get dislodged or sometimes people used to remove them for making cutting tools. I got the one and went to the blacksmith who is a father of my classmate and asked to him to make the sickle. He refused to do so, because he knew the law and vigilance of railway system. Then I changed the strategy and met the scrap collector—Sabanna, a humble man who used to collect metals, plastics, bottles etc and used to offer roasted black gram and salted horse gram. Surprisingly, he also refused to take it and still offered the snacks. Then, I kept the metal piece in a hidden place and life went on. One day, my mother's cousin, Mr. Chowdaiah, who worked for the railways, came to stay with us. He often spent several days each month at our home. He used to explain the train accidents due to misplace of fishplate and the punishment for those who steal it. Though many railway property used to kept in the open space, no one had the courage to steal them or they were aware of the law of the land.

I do not claim that I directly learned life's great principles from the people I mentioned earlier, but I am certain that the environment and circumstances in which I grew up profoundly shaped who I am today. The simplicity of my upbringing, surrounded by modest people and the uncomplicated pleasures of life, left an indelible mark on me, like a deep stain of dark ink that can never be erased. It instilled in me values of honesty, humility, and the ability to find joy in the smallest things—lessons that have become rare in today's world.

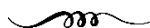
In a time when so many are seeking to simplify their lives, spending immense effort and resources to return to the basics, I was fortunate to have been born into a life that naturally embodied simplicity. The joy we found in wild fruits, the camaraderie we shared over vada pieces, the excitement of gathering around a steam engine, or sneaking through fields for stolen treats—these were not just fleeting childhood memories; they were reflections of a life where

material possessions were scarce, but contentment and meaning were abundant.

The essence of life, as I see it, is not about accumulating wealth or chasing after complexity. It's about nurturing an honest heart and appreciating the beauty of a simple existence. I've learned that simplicity is not something to be achieved through grand gestures or deliberate effort—it's a state of being that arises naturally when we are in harmony with ourselves and the world around us. Many people spend their lives trying to peel away the layers of complication they've accumulated, searching for that elusive state of simplicity. Yet, for me, it was a gift, woven into the very fabric of my early life.

My experiences taught me that real richness lies not in what we possess, but in how we live and interact with the world. It is in living honestly, staying true to oneself, and finding joy in the simple, everyday moments. This realization has become a guiding principle in my life, a reminder that no matter how much the world around us changes, the timeless values of integrity, humility, and simplicity will always remain the cornerstones of a meaningful existence. "Step into the 'Arabian Sea'—*my home* and a passage through the philosophy that has shaped my life. As you read, you may discover your own sea."

“There is only one kind of love in this world; Intensity and Purpose may vary—Magada”



Wave 02

The Failures of Truth

Krishnappa and the Ball

The farmers are God-fearing people who traditionally worship water, the sun, soil, stones, trees, plants, snakes, cows, monkeys, and more. Once a year, our entire family would attend the *Jatre*, a grand festival where thousands of devotees gather to worship and pull the Theru—a chariot carrying the idol of the deity. We would arrive at the destination in the evening, with no concept of lodging or boarding. We camped by the roadside, waiting for the chariot, and offered bananas with dhavana—an aromatic plant branch tucked into them—as a tribute to the deity. In a time before electronic communication systems, trust was our only belief, and it never failed us.

At one such event, I needed to go to the “two-side,” which was a local term for using the lavatory, and I wandered off toward a nearby lake. In the chaos of the crowd, I got separated and went missing. Eventually, some people found me, but by that time, my mother was already frustrated because, within just a few hours, termites had attacked our food. As if that weren’t enough, while she was feeling restless and stressed, I began demanding a ball, which cost Re. 0.75 each.

Irritated by my constant crying, my mother finally took me to the tent shops where vendors were selling small toys and other items. She asked the shopkeeper for the ball and tried bargaining

with him, insisting that back in our hometown, the ball was sold for 50 paise. However, the shopkeeper refused to lower the price. In an effort to calm me down, my mother told me she would buy me the ball at Krishnappa's small store back home—a store that felt like a supermarket to us back then.

Suddenly, without thinking, I blurted out the truth, saying, “*Avva*”—the affectionate term we used for our mother—“it’s actually one rupee for the ball at Krishnappa’s store.” Because I had asked about it several times in that store. My words, though unintended, embarrassed my mother in front of the shopkeeper. Feeling insulted, she became furious and unleashed her frustration on me, hitting and scolding me with all her might. I cried uncontrollably, as if the world were ending. Even now, whenever I see a ball, I’m reminded of that *jatre* and the memory of my mother, my dear *Avva*.

Spitting in the Mouth

During vacations, we used to visit my sister’s house in Tavarekere, a small area in the agricultural town of Mandya, Karnataka, in southern India. As a side income, a worker at my sister’s house named Chandranna would collect sand from nearby rivulets and sell it for construction purposes. There were often large heaps of sand, and we would spend time gathering conches, clams, cones, and other shells. The neighbourhood kids would join us in this activity.

One day, a boy named Umesh asked me “Who I was”. I told him that I am younger brother Siddaraju. My brother also introduced me as his sibling, but Umesh didn’t believe him, saying I was darker than my brother. We had no way to prove our relation. Suddenly, Umesh suggested I eat the food that my brother had already taken a bite of, as it was uncommon for unrelated people to share food. Since we didn’t have any food at that moment, my brother decided to prove our bond by spitting into my mouth, and I ended up swallowing it.

Although I was right in both incidents, I was punished harshly the first time and unjustly the second. Yet, I hold no resentment or sorrow for being punished or insulted in those moments. In fact, looking back, I am grateful for those experiences. They were not just

moments of pain or embarrassment; they were transformative lessons that shaped my resilience.

The first incident, where I was punished despite being right, taught me that life's rewards don't always come immediately or fairly. But those very setbacks planted the seeds of determination within me, motivating me to dream bigger, work harder, and rise above my circumstances. Today, as I reflect on that moment, I realize that it empowered me to achieve success. Now, I have the ability to buy thousands of those balls that once seemed so important—a symbol of how far I have come.

The second seemingly insignificant incident, where I was punished again, this time for an innocent remark, serves as a reminder of the love and truthfulness that existed between my brother and me. That shared moment, though small, reinforced the bond we shared—a bond not built on material things but on trust, honesty, and mutual respect.

Fly Ash

During my middle school which was next to the 'Sugar Factory' at Mandya was one of the better schools of those times; but the fly ash used to deposit everywhere. All our clothes get dirty dark by the deposited ash. Once, I told my teacher that all the ash can be sent to water. Teacher said facing all the students "*Here is a great scientist*" and turned towards me and said "*Do it when you become big scientist*". Few times, I complained about the ash and teacher made me to clean the floor. Teacher was unrest because of my talkativeness. Two decades later, in an unexpected turn of events, I found myself standing before the Board Members of a prominent sugar factory. It was a moment that felt surreal, considering my humble beginnings and the journey that had brought me to this point. As I stood there, addressing a group of seasoned professionals and decision-makers, I explained with confidence how fly ash—an industrial by-product often viewed as waste—could be managed safely and transformed into concrete, bricks, tiles and other products something valuable.

What made the moment truly significant wasn't just the technical knowledge I was sharing, but the realization of how far I

had come. Fly ash, typically seen as an environmental hazard, could be disposed of safely if handled properly and could even be repurposed for various uses. I elaborated on potential methods for utilizing it in construction materials, such as bricks, or in agriculture to improve soil structure.

The board listened intently, as I laid out the practical, sustainable solutions. I felt a deep sense of accomplishment, knowing that I was contributing to a cause that had real-world impact—turning waste into a resource, improving efficiency, and helping the factory operate more sustainably.

In that moment, I realized the significance of all the experiences and lessons I'd gathered over the years. From my early days of curiosity about the world, to the challenges I faced, each step had prepared me to speak with authority on a topic of such importance. What had once been an idea I might have never imagined addressing, had now turned into a solution I was confident could help the factory, the environment, and the community at large. However, they never implemented it, instead, many years later, they adopted a different kind of filters to reduce the fly ash.

The sense of fulfilment in that room wasn't just about sharing knowledge; it was about knowing that my insights were helping to pave the way for a more responsible and resourceful future, and I had a role in making it happen.

Minchings

In the year 1979 itself, the 'mid-day meal program' was already in place, and the government provided maize-based extruded biscuits commonly known as 'Minchings', both sweet and savoury. Later, the menu shifted to 'wheat upma', a popular Indian dish. Some students refused to collect it, feeling that it was below their dignity. Such thoughts were costly for us. One particular day stands out in my memory. A friend of mine had already collected his share of biscuits, secretly stored them somewhere, and then came back to stand in the line again, hoping to receive more.

As an innocent child, I thought it was only right to point out what I saw, so I informed the teacher that my friend was trying to

get a second helping. The teacher called him over and questioned him, but my friend denied it, insisting that this was his first time in line. The teacher believed him without question and, unfortunately, turned his anger toward me. While it seemed fair at first that the teacher would trust my friend, what happened next was unexpected. He went on to hit me, punishing me for what he thought was a lie. To make matters worse, the whole class burst out laughing as I stood there, humiliated.

At the time, I couldn't fully understand the injustice of the situation, but it left a deep mark on me. The experience was more than just a moment of physical punishment; it was a lesson in the complexities of truth and perception. I had done what I thought was right, yet I was punished for it. My innocence collided with the teacher's authority, and my sense of fairness was shattered in that instant.

Looking back, this experience speaks to larger themes about human nature and the world we live in. Often, people are quick to believe what they find convenient, even if it's not the truth. Sometimes, standing for what's right doesn't yield immediate rewards and can even result in pain or embarrassment. But that doesn't make truth any less important. At the time, the laughter of my classmates and the punishment from my teacher felt deeply unfair, but that incidence, taught me courage. It made me realize that truth isn't always acknowledged, and justice isn't always swift, but it's still worth standing for—and that's something I've never wavered from. It's not that I never tell lies; occasionally, I tell harmless ones that don't cause harm to anyone. But when it comes to what matters, my commitment to truth remains unchanged.

Sugartown Police Station

Mandya is one of the largest sugarcane growing areas and popularly known as “Sugarland”, but the area around sugar factory is officially known as “Sugartown”. The sugar factory sprawled across hundreds of acres, and it was more than just a place of work; it was a world unto itself. There were separate clubs for men and women, tennis court, billiards room, a small garden that resembled

the famous Brindavan Gardens, fountains, a stage, and flower beds blooming with a variety of plants. Towering coconut trees dotted the landscape, giving the factory grounds a serene was a peaceful environment; but one particular day, things took a sudden turn for the worse.

I was on my way home from somewhere when I ran into one of my classmates, Channa. He was the kind of person everyone knew—funny, careless, and always up to something mischievous. As we chatted, he asked if he could borrow my sickle. Without thinking twice, I handed it to him, assuming he needed it for something to cut. Little did I know that Channa had other plans. He used the sickle to cut down tender coconuts from the trees in the park and, unsurprisingly, got caught by the police.

Under the pressure of police questioning, Channa cracked and told them that the sickle belonged to me. The next thing I knew, two officers showed up at my house, demanding that I come with them to the station. My parents were distraught and begged the officers not to take me away, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. I was dragged to the station, heart pounding with fear, where I found Channa already sitting there, exhausted from crying.

Like Channa, I had always been terrified of police stations and the entire law enforcement system. I tried to explain to the officers that I was innocent, but the inspector didn't believe a word I said. He was convinced that this was the work of a group of boys, and his shouting echoed in the station. I felt hopeless, thinking my fate was sealed. However, one of the police constable, Sannamadanna, happened to be from our local community. He knew me and my family, and he stepped in to convince the inspector that we were just two kids who had made a mistake. After some deliberation, the inspector softened, taking into account our age and inexperience, and eventually let us go. Channa and I sprinted out of the station, our hearts racing as though we had just won the greatest race of our lives.

But the nightmare didn't end there. When I reached home, my parents were nowhere to be found. Worried, Channa and I set out to

search for them, only to discover that they had already walked over a mile away, heading toward a drastic and tragic decision—they were on their way to commit suicide. My involvement in the coconut theft had pushed them over the edge, and they believed they had lost all honour because of me. I ran to them, begging and pleading, trying to convince them of my innocence. Tearfully, I explained that I hadn't stolen anything, that I had simply made the mistake of lending my sickle to Channa without knowing his intentions.

After what felt like an eternity, my parents finally relented and returned home with me. They were still deeply shaken by the whole ordeal, but instead of harsh punishment, they sat me down and gave me one of the most valuable lessons of my life. They preached the importance of ethics, honesty, and integrity. They reminded me that no matter the situation, stealing—whether big or small—was never acceptable.

This incident left a lasting impact on me. It wasn't just about the fear of police or the shame that had almost driven my parents to an unthinkable act. It was about the lessons they instilled in my heart that day—the values of truth, responsibility, and morality. Looking back, I realize that my parents' teachings were more than just words; they shaped the core of who I became. Although my parents lacked formal education, their wisdom was immense, and they constantly inspired us to dream big and live by strong ethical values. Through their love, fear, and wisdom, they showed me the path to leading an ethical life, and for that, I am forever grateful.

In the bigger picture, moments like these remind us that life is not always a happy colourful canvas, and we are often tested in unexpected ways. But these challenges help shape our understanding of right and wrong, teaching us to hold on to our values even when it's difficult. *"In reality, we had nothing to lose; everything was a bonus. If, by chance, we didn't get what we desired, it simply wasn't meant for us."* The laughter that once stung has now faded, but the lesson of standing for what I believed to be right has stayed with me for a lifetime.

In all the incidents, in their own ways, have shaped who I am. They taught me that life is not always fair, but that doesn't mean we stop moving forward. They taught me that love and truth are the real treasures, far greater than any ball I could buy. Instead of being weighed down by the pain of the past, I celebrate how it pushed me to grow and appreciate what truly matters.

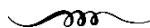
During our annual family reunions, I share these stories with everyone present, and each time they provoke laughter and tears of joy. These moments of storytelling carry with them more than just the surface humour or nostalgia—they are reminders of the essence of family itself. In reliving these memories, we reflect on the shared experiences that bind us together, transforming what once might have felt like small, trivial moments into profound markers of our journey.

The laughter comes from a place of recognition, as everyone relates to the innocence of childhood and the quirks of growing up. But beyond the humour, there is a deeper layer of emotion. The tears of joy stem from an appreciation of how far we've come, and how those seemingly insignificant moments have shaped us as individuals and as a family. Each story is a reminder of our resilience, of the lessons learned through hardship, and of the love that remains constant despite life's ups and downs.

In these reunions, these stories serve as bridges—connecting the past to the present, and the older generation to the younger. The laughter signifies that we have healed from whatever pain or embarrassment those moments caused. The tears speak of gratitude for having shared a life rich with meaning, where even the smallest event has left an indelible mark on our hearts.

These reunions and stories reaffirm the beauty of human connection. They teach us that happiness is not found in perfection or successful events; but in embracing our imperfections, our shared humanity, and the love that flows through all of life's experiences—whether joyous or challenging.

“All are actors; Only a few will act on the stage—Magada”



Wave 03

Operation Diamond Racket

In the year 1981, I moved to Bangalore to attend higher secondary school at Rajajinagar. It was a free boarding school, but the meals provided were far from sufficient—just two meagre servings a day, barely enough to sustain us. About 20% of the students were day-scholars, commuting from their homes. Unlike us, they would bring packed lunches in tiffin carriers, which they ate during lunch breaks. Next to our school was a kilometre-long narrow park, where the day-scholars would go for their lunch.

Feeling the hunger pangs and isolation, I used to walk to the park too, but instead of eating, I would sit on one of the benches and silently cry for thirty minutes, longing for home and a proper meal. Afterward, I'd wipe my tears, compose myself, and return to class as though nothing had happened. Those were tough times, and the disparity between the day-scholars and us boarding students only deepened my sense of loneliness.

One of those days, while wandering around with the sense of adventure that came with our newfound freedom, I stumbled upon something captivating—a film shooting. It was for the movie *Hosa Itihasa*, which translates to *New History*, starring the renowned actors Mrs. Jayamala and Mr. Prabhakar. They were filming an intense escape scene, filled with drama.

As I stood there, watching the actors perform their roles, the title of the film—*New History*—struck me deeply. Now (in the year 2025), I couldn't help but draw a parallel between the movie and my own

life. In a way, wasn't I also trying to create a new history of my own? Much like the characters in that scene trying to escape their situation, I, too, was navigating the complexities of youth—trying to break free from the mould set by societal expectations, from the limitations imposed by my circumstances, and from the invisible chains that often bind our dreams.

In the grand narrative of life, we all seek to create our own version of history. It's not just the famous people—the movie stars, the politicians, or the great leaders—who leave their mark. Each of us, in our own way, is carving out a story, escaping from the past, striving for something better, something new. The idea of creating a "new history" is not merely about making grand gestures or achieving widespread fame; it's about the small, quiet victories—finding one's identity, breaking free from old limitations, and daring to dream beyond the confines of the present.

That fleeting moment on the film set was more than just an accidental encounter with fame. It was a reminder that, like the actors in the scene, we are all playing our parts in the ever-unfolding drama of life. And maybe, just maybe, I was scripting my own *Hosa Itihasa*—one where I was the hero of my story, making bold choices and striving to escape into the life I was destined to create.

There were times when a few kind-hearted day scholars offered me their lunch. They could see the hunger in my eyes and my silent struggle, but every time they extended their generosity, I politely declined. I would tell them, "I don't eat lunch," trying to maintain a facade of pride and independence. However, the truth was that accepting their lunch would make my fellow hostel mates, who were also enduring the same hardship, feel even more despondent and helpless.

The situation at our boarding school was tough. We were all in the same boat, surviving on two insufficient meals a day, barely enough to sustain us through the long hours of study and activity. If word got out that I was eating lunch with the day scholars, it would only deepen the divide between those who had and those who had not. The others in the hostel would have felt left out, even more

aware of their own hunger, and I didn't want to be the cause of their suffering. My conscience wouldn't allow me to accept the help, knowing the effect it might have on my friends.

One of my close friends, Kiran, who lived at home and came to school each day with a tiffin carrier full of food, observed our quiet struggle. He could sense the unspoken pain and the invisible barrier that stood between the day scholars and us. Out of sheer empathy and solidarity, Kiran made a silent, noble decision. He stopped bringing his tiffin carrier to school altogether, choosing instead to endure the same hardship as we did. It was his way of standing with us, even though he had the option of a better meal from home.

Kiran's decision touched me deeply. He could have easily continued to bring his lunch, and no one would have judged him for it. But he chose to forgo that comfort out of a profound sense of compassion for his friends. His small act of sacrifice resonated with me more than any grand gesture could. It was a reminder that, even in the hardest of times, there were people around me who understood, who cared, and who were willing to share in our struggles—not through words, but through their actions.

A classmate, Nagaraj, the son of a police inspector, and Lalitha, the daughter of a landlord, soon followed in Kiran's footsteps. Looking back, those difficult days were filled with small moments of humanity like Kiran's, moments that left lasting imprints on my heart. It was through these acts of kindness and solidarity that I learned the true meaning of friendship and empathy. In the face of adversity, it wasn't just the physical hunger we fought, but the emotional and psychological battles that came with it. And yet, through the shared hardship, we found a sense of community and brotherhood that transcended the struggles of our daily lives.

The Ambedkar Institute

The Ambedkar which is one of the premier institutes in the state had just started then, and there was a strong drive to prove that they were in no way inferior to any other prestigious institution. To reinforce this sense of pride and identity, the school introduced a new uniform—a striking combination of a navy blue pant, sky blue shirt,

a belt, and sleek judo blue shoes and white uniforms on Wednesday and the Saturdays. It was a bold statement, and we wore it with pride, eager to represent our school in the best way possible.

During the Republic Day parade, we truly shined. Our team marched with precision and discipline, and to everyone's surprise, we took first place in the march past, outshining even well-known schools like St. Joseph's and Bishop Cotton. It was a moment of glory for the institute and a clear indication that we were a force to be reckoned with.

Sports was another area where we excelled. Ravikumar, from Srirampuram— *one of the places known for rowdyism in Bangalore*, Theerathlingaiah from remote village in Mandya who was a kind of professional thief from the street vendors and Annadani from Huskur village were stars in kabaddi and volleyball, earning respect and admiration not just from our school but from others as well. Annadani once brought the '*Korabadu*—the dry meat to the hostel and we nicknamed as "Korr"—he went on to become a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA). As for me, I found my talent in singing and drama. I brought home a few prizes for the school through my performances and acted in plays alongside our teachers, which was an unforgettable experience. These activities gave me a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie.

Despite all these achievements and the thriving atmosphere in the school, there was one thing that always fell short—the food. It was a topic of constant grumbling among us students, as the meals provided were far from satisfying. But even with this downside, the sense of unity, the victories, and the memorable experiences we shared made our time at Ambedkar Institute a defining chapter in our lives.

The real story begins with Mr. B.P. Chabbi, our sports teacher, was notorious for his strictness. He ruled with an iron hand and ensured that none of us ventured outside the school compound without permission. His imposing presence made even the bravest students think twice before stepping out of line. Despite his stern demeanour, I found myself itching for a little adventure.

In response, I gradually became the ringleader of a small group of friends, all of whom shared a love for cinema. We were drawn to the allure of movies, especially the excitement and glamour that came with them. My fascination with Kannada cinema, and particularly the legendary Dr. Rajkumar, enhanced my storytelling within the group. One day, I boldly told my friends that I had already met Dr. Rajkumar at Shivapura, near Hotel Hebbur. It was entirely true. The admiration in their eyes was immediate. They looked at me as though I had accomplished something extraordinary, as if meeting the great matinee idol was a personal triumph. In their eyes, I was no longer just a fellow student—I was someone who had brushed shoulders with greatness, someone who had experienced a moment they all dreamed of.

This small embellishment of mine brought our group even closer, as we all bonded over our shared love for films and the desire to experience a bit of the magic that cinema brought into our lives. Despite the strict rules of Mr. Chabbi, our small gang managed to find a sense of freedom in our imaginations and the stories we shared with each other. It was a way to escape the rigid boundaries of school life and dream of a world beyond the confines of our school compound.

For me, it wasn't just about the movies or the stories—it was about finding camaraderie in a group of like-minded individuals. We might not have been allowed to break the rules outright, but we created our own little escape, finding joy in the simple act of storytelling, dreaming, and imagining something bigger than the reality we faced every day. Even under the watchful eye of Mr. Chabbi, and the deadliest warden Mr. Rudraiah. Some of the students used to catch the cockroaches, bedbugs and other primitive creatures and release them to the warden's room. We found our own way to rebel, not through disobedience, but through the power of dreams and the shared love for cinema.

However, in the midst of these challenging days, I discovered something that would become a small but significant highlight in my routine. Just a few meters from our school, I found out that Dr. Rajkumar, the legendary matinee idol of the Kannada film industry,

lived nearby. Fascinated by the idea of being so close to such a prominent figure, I thought of seeing him in person. Through word of mouth, I learned that Dr. Rajkumar had a habit of walking around his compound every Saturday evening, from 7:00 to 8:00 pm.

This small discovery brought a sense of excitement and distraction to my otherwise monotonous and difficult days. It gave me something to look forward to every week. Even though I was still struggling with the hunger and homesickness, knowing that I could catch a glimpse of the revered actor made things just a little more bearable. In many ways, it was this small source of inspiration that helped me navigate through those challenging early days in Bangalore.

Operation Diamond Racket

I know “Operation Diamond Racket” is a far-fetched title for my story, but I chose it anyway, partly because it’s one of the famous movies of Dr. Rajkumar, and partly because what I’m about to narrate feels like our very own version of a covert operation. It’s not about diamonds or crime, but rather, a series of thrilling escapes that took place at the hostel where we lived during our school days.

The hostel itself was an architectural wonder, a structure that felt as much like a fortress as it did a place of learning and living. On the ground floor, we had a prayer hall where we gathered every day, and next to it, the dining hall where we’d share meals. The first floor was lined with rooms for the students, and the second floor housed our classrooms. It was a compact yet expansive building, with everything we needed for our academic lives.

But the real intrigue came from the unique window design in our rooms. Each window had a small ventilator near the top, framed by iron rods placed exactly six inches apart. The placement of those rods might have seemed fool proof to the architects, but for the resourceful seniors, it was nothing more than a small obstacle. Over the years, many of them had carefully bent those rods just enough to create a narrow passage through which a determined student could squeeze out. It wasn’t easy, but it was possible if you knew how.

The moment you made it through the window, the adventure really began. Just outside, there was a one-inch water pipe running down the side of the building, and if you were brave enough, you had to grab hold of that pipe and glide down it—a 20-foot drop to the ground below. This was not a simple task, especially in the dead of night when no one could see, but for those daring enough, it was a rush of adrenaline.

Once you reached the ground, the next challenge awaited: the compound wall. It stood a good eight feet tall, a formidable barrier that separated us from the world outside. Climbing it wasn't easy, but with enough determination, you could scramble up and jump down to the grassy patch on the other side. Many had tried, and quite a few had succeeded—but not without injury. The jump from the wall often resulted in twisted ankles, bruises, or even sprains, but that didn't stop anyone. The sense of freedom waiting on the other side was worth the risk.

For us, these night-time escapes felt like missions—silent, risky, and full of excitement. The seniors were our role models in this, passing down the knowledge of how to bend the rods, glide down the pipe, and scale the wall without alerting the hostel warden. Every successful escape was like a victory, a secret shared among a select few who were brave enough to take the plunge.

In retrospect, I realize how absurd and reckless it was. But at the time, it felt like the ultimate adventure, a way to break free from the rigid discipline of hostel life and experience a brief moment of exhilaration. It wasn't just about getting out; it was about the thrill of outsmarting the system, about proving to ourselves that we could find a way to freedom, even if it was just for a short while.

We all wanted to see Dr Rajkumar and so, in the spirit of Dr. Rajkumar's "Operation Diamond Racket," our little operation was born—an unspoken ritual passed down from batch to batch, a symbol of our youthful defiance. The mission was to escape at 7.0 a.m. on Saturday. We did not sleep well. We were planning to escape to see Dr Rajkumar. In the night, one person suddenly asked me, "Do movie actors go to the bathroom?" Everyone burst out laughing.

About six of us escaped and wait in the park to see Dr Rajkumar coming out.

As soon as we saw Dr. Rajkumar, I ran up and held his hand. It was surreal to watch the man I had seen only on the big screen, now so close, living his normal life. My heart raced. And yet, something struck me in that moment—it wasn't the glamorous superstar from the movies I saw in front of me, but a regular man.

He was incredibly kind, asking us a few questions, though I didn't fully understand what he was saying. He encouraged us to study hard and become respectable officers. My friends were overjoyed, jumping around in excitement. Shortly after, someone from his house came out and politely asked us to leave.

When we returned to school, it felt like we had committed a serious offense. A crowd had gathered, and our trunks were placed outside. Mr. B.P. Chabbi told us to stand aside while he ran off to inform the headmistress, Mrs. H.R. Kokila. They seemed to be in deep discussion about something. Seizing the chaotic moment, we took the opportunity to run away. We headed straight to the 22-foot monolithic Anjaneya—one of the Hindu gods temple at Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore. Since it was a Saturday—Anjaneya's day—they were distributing prasadam.

We took turns having full meals, repeatedly going back to collect more food—the prasadam. To build trust, we began cleaning the temple grounds, which earned us the affection of the priests, who appreciated our acts of devotion. At night, we slept in the park next to the temple, gazing at the stars with no clear plans ahead. My thoughts were simply on Dr. Rajkumar. The school management was deeply concerned about the missing boys. There were five of us, and though the school had decided to allow us back into the institute, we were completely unaware of this decision.

The next day, a Sunday, we headed straight to Dr. Rajkumar's house. When he saw us, he seemed surprised and said, "Why have you come back? I met you just yesterday. Go back to the hostel and focus on your studies." Overcome with emotion, we began to cry and explained the situation. Understanding the gravity of our distress,

Dr. Rajkumar felt deeply sorry for us and assured us that he would personally speak to the school management on our behalf. Just then, his brother, may be Mr. Varadappa, arrived and offered to accompany us back to the hostel.

By the time we reached the hostel, word of our return had spread, and our fellow students welcomed us like celebrities. The once-worried atmosphere had turned into one of celebration, and we felt a sense of relief and belonging once again.

During that summer vacation, when I returned home, I poured my heart out to my mother, sharing the hunger and stress I had faced on campus. She, too, cried with me, feeling my pain, yet she encouraged me to continue at the school. She would always try to make us understand the importance of studies and emphasize its seriousness by saying, 'I used to work as a labourer, traveling all the way to Dadamalli—a distant village—for paddy transplanting.' She would also recall seeing blood oozing from my father's fingers as he dug soil from trenches to set up electric poles. Her tears reflected the depth of a mother's love, but her words were filled with wisdom and resolve. I returned to school with a renewed sense of purpose.

The Great Lady “Gangamma—My mother”

The ‘GA’ of surname comes from my mother's name. One Sunday, my mother unexpectedly appeared in front of my school, and the moment I saw her, I broke down. The sight of her—an extraordinary woman—taking a bus from Mandya to Bangalore, traveling about 100 kilo metres, then switching to a city bus to reach the Navarang bus stop, named after a cinema hall, followed by a 2-kilo meter walk to my hostel, was beyond imagination. That was my courageous mother. She embodied resilience, strength, and determination—qualities she had passed down to me.

We sat together in the park in front of Dr. Rajkumar's house, and I began narrating the whole ordeal to her. She had come prepared, carrying with her “idly,” a traditional baked rice dish, along with mutton curry and boiled eggs. She lovingly insisted that I eat everything she had brought. As we embraced, both of us cried—our tears speaking volumes of love, sacrifice, and the deep bond we

shared. She didn't just console me; she reminded me of my purpose, urging me to study well and strive to become a good officer.

In the joy of reuniting with my mother and indulging in the comforting, homemade food, I didn't even realize that she hadn't eaten a single bite with me. It was only later that the weight of her silent sacrifice dawned on me. This simple, yet profound act of selflessness was one of many that my mother made throughout her life.

These sacrifices etched themselves deeply into my soul, shaping my character and instilling in me a sense of humility and strong human values. My mother's unwavering courage, her quiet strength, and her ability to endure hardship with grace became the foundation upon which my own values were built. Through her actions, I learned the true essence of love, sacrifice, and humility, lessons that have stayed with me and moulded me into the person I am today.

Growing up, I, like many others, held cinema actors in a kind of reverence, almost as if they were otherworldly figures, larger than life. The silver screen portrayed them as flawless beings—always charismatic, always heroic, with perfect timing and impeccable looks. Dr. Rajkumar, a legend of Kannada cinema, was one such figure. He was an idol for so many of us, his on-screen persona filling our hearts with awe and admiration. In few occasions, the young boy of 6-7 year old Mr Lohith-later changed to Punith Rajkumar used join us. Many times, he played cricket with us. We were just happy to play with the son of a great actor. He had already acted in the cinema. Other sons of Dr Rajkumar used to come there. Since, they were not in the cinema, I do not have any good memories.

During my 10th grade, we were given a bit more freedom to move around. After meeting Dr. Rajkumar several times, I had a realization that changed my perspective on celebrities forever. I discovered that Dr. Rajkumar's house was just a few meters from our hostel. The thought of living so close to such an iconic figure was thrilling. I would often sit on a bench, gazing at his house from a distance, eagerly hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Every Saturday, people gathered outside, and I would observe the activity around his

compound, captivated by the possibility of seeing him. I even had the opportunity to walk with him in the park a few times, and I felt an immense sense of pride when he started to recognize my face and name.

I started to notice the small, everyday things. He ate like us. He had his meals at set times, just like we did. He used the same gestures, the same kind of utensils. He chewed his food slowly, as any ordinary person would. There was no grandiosity in this daily act—just a man nourishing himself.

It made me realize that we often place people on pedestals, believing that their fame somehow makes them immune to the ordinary struggles of life. But then it hit me: he wasn't just the flawless hero from the films; he was a human being, living a life not so different from ours. He had to go through the same mundane tasks—eating, drinking, and even defecating, just like the rest of us. The cinematic illusion was shattered, but in a good way. The myth around him began to dissolve, replaced by the understanding that no matter how famous or admired, cinema actors are human beings first, experiencing the same vulnerabilities, exhaustion, and joy as anyone else.

This realization may seem simple, but for a young mind that had idolized film stars, it was profound. It stripped away the mystique of celebrity and made me see the world differently. I understood that fame, glory, and adoration did not exempt anyone from the basic realities of life. Everyone, whether a cinema star or a common man, deals with the same bodily needs, the same struggles, and the same emotions.

This realization made me more grounded and more empathetic. It allowed me to admire people for their craft, while also understanding that no one is beyond the basic human experience. From that point on, I no longer saw cinema stars as untouchable figures, but as people who had mastered the art of acting, dancing, just like how we are mastering our own lives, day by day. In that realization, I found a deeper connection to the world—not through

the idea of grandeur, but through the shared humanity that unites us all.

The ISKCON

As I said earlier, during our 10th standard, we were allowed to move around more freely, and after seeing Dr. Rajkumar in the mornings, a few of us students would explore the area. One day, we found out that another famous actress, Mrs. Jayanthi, lived on ‘West of Chord Road’. On our way back, we noticed an unusual gathering at a three-story building, with some foreign faces among the crowd. Curious, we went inside. The atmosphere was serene and divine, with saffron-clad individuals warmly greeting everyone. They greeted us as well, asked us to sit, and offered us prasadam—it was the upcoming ‘ISKCON’.

Soon, we became regular visitors to ISKCON. Every week, we would find ourselves there, sitting among the saffron-clad devotees, absorbing the peaceful atmosphere. They even gave us some stylish clothes from other countries, which made us feel quite special. We began learning their songs, chanting along, and even helping out with small tasks. It all seemed harmless at first, like a fun way to pass the time and meet new people.

But as time went on, we noticed something interesting—ISKCON wasn’t just handing out prasadam and fancy clothes. They were gently trying to pull us deeper into their world. They wanted us to become more involved, to fully embrace their teachings and lifestyle. Honestly, I wasn’t quite sure how or why they were so persistent. And truth be told, I was a bit of a rebel and an atheist even back then, which probably made me the least likely candidate for their mission!

It became a kind of unspoken game for us. We’d go to ISKCON, enjoy the food and the clothes, learn the songs, and then subtly dodge any serious commitments. They tried to reel us in, but somehow, we always managed to slip away at the last moment. It wasn’t anything against ISKCON, really—they were kind and generous people. We just weren’t ready to give up our freedom and dive into something so structured.

Fast forward to today, and ISKCON has grown into a massive international institution, with an impressive temple in Bangalore that attracts people from all over the world. Sometimes, I think back and laugh at how close we came to joining the fold, but something always held us back—whether it was our youthful mischief, our love for freedom, or just the fact that I wasn't ready to embrace a spiritual path at that time. I cannot put it any better manner. It was all part of the fun, and in a strange way, our little "escape" from the school and the ISKCON became few of those memorable adventures of our school days.

In 2018, I received an unexpected call from an unknown number. On the other end, a voice politely introduced himself and said he wanted to invite me as a guest for the upcoming School Day function. To my surprise and delight, it was none other than our beloved sports teacher, Mr. B.P. Chabbi. What struck me most was how he addressed me—by calling me 'Sir.' In that moment, I was overwhelmed with happiness and pride.

Mr. Chabbi, a once tough and intimidating teacher whom I used to fear, was now extending an invitation to me with great respect. He was now working at Basaveshwara High School in Rajaji Nagar, Bangalore. It was an honour to attend the event as the 'Chief Guest,' but what truly filled my heart with joy was the "Guard of Honour" the school's scouts team gave me. Standing there, receiving that salute, I felt a deep sense of fulfilment and gratitude. The moment was filled with grace as my wife stood by my side—once an ordinary, unorganized student, now a respected guest before the same teacher. It reminded me of how education and success shape society's perspective.

I am a 'Born Winner'

After completing my 10th standard in Bangalore, I returned home. Every year, regardless of our academic commitments or financial circumstances, we would all gather for important occasions like the Hindu New Year—Yugadi—and the Lord Ganesha festival. It was a tradition that brought our family together, no matter where life had taken us.

On one such occasion, after enjoying a lavish meal with my family, a question suddenly crossed my mind. I turned to my mother and asked, "Why do I have dark skin?" Unlike me, all of my brothers and my sister had fair skin. My question caught the attention of everyone, and my mother, with a light-hearted chuckle, replied, "Be happy that you were born!" Her playful response made everyone burst into laughter.

She was busy in the kitchen at the time, preparing something. After hearing more insistent questions, she returned to our gathering, her smile fading a little. Finally, she gave in to our curiosity and began to recount a tragic story, one that none of us had ever heard before.

She began by saying, "I took every possible herb to try and abort you when you were in my womb." Her words left us all in shock. We sat there, stunned by the weight of her confession. She continued, her voice steady but filled with emotion, "At that time, I already had four surviving children, and one of my babies had passed away. Your father and I were struggling, unsure of how to provide for the four we had. The thought of a fifth child felt like an unbearable burden on our small family. So, I made the difficult decision to try and abort you using herbal remedies."

Despite her efforts, I was born on May 20, 1969. In that moment, she looked at me and cried. "In this context, I am a born winner." Her words carried both the sadness of her past struggle and the pride she now felt.

After sharing this painful yet powerful story, she pulled me into a tight embrace, tears streaming down her face. The room was filled with a mix of emotions—laughter mingled with tears as my siblings, too, were overwhelmed by the revelation. The weight of what she had said hung in the air, but the laughter and the tears showed how deeply this story had touched us all.

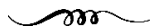
Later in life, I had the opportunity to address a gathering of over 5,000 young people at Vivekananda College in Puttur during the year 2019. It was a special occasion, made even more meaningful by the presence of my mother and wife in the audience. During my

speech, I decided to share a deeply personal story—the one about my mother's struggle and her decision to try and abort me due to the hardships she faced at the time.

As I recounted the story, the entire hall fell into a profound silence, each word hanging in the air. I explained not to evoke sympathy, but to highlight my mother's incredible strength and resilience. It wasn't about her attempt to abort me, but about how she overcame that moment of despair to raise me and help me reach the point where I could stand before such a large audience.

When I finished, the silence transformed into a powerful moment of recognition. The entire audience stood up in unison, giving my mother a standing ovation—not for what she had tried to do back then, but for what she ultimately did. They honoured her for her courage and for raising me to achieve this level in life. It was a moment of immense respect, one that celebrated a mother's unwavering love and perseverance, even in the face of adversity.

“Genes influences the personality by 5% and rest by the environment”- not said by me; I am just an example— Magada



Waves 04

The Bicycle Man

We had a bicycle, which, at that time, was considered a prized possession, almost a symbol of wealth and independence. It wasn't just a means of transport but something we took pride in. We cleaned it meticulously, almost every day, as if caring for it brought us closer to a sense of responsibility. My brother Siddaraju knew to dismantle and reassemble the entire cycle. Learning to ride it, however, wasn't easy for me. I had to do it the hard way.

My journey began from Shivapura rail station to the Satyagraha Soudha- a building erected to honor the freedom rally of 1938. It was only about 250 meters, but the road sloped downward toward the Soudha, flanked by deep water drainage canals beside the lush paddy fields. I didn't learn to ride a bicycle in the usual way. I would insert my leg through the triangular frame and pedal while resting my underarm on the tip of the seat. We used to call this technique "*OLapetlu*", meaning pedaling from the inside. I would start from the station, letting the bicycle roll on its own, carried by the pull of gravity. But there was danger along the way—a drain crossed the road, overgrown with dense *Ugani hambu*- one of the abundant weeds with strongest vines and typha plants, their presence creating an almost jungle-like atmosphere.

One day, as I allowed the bicycle to glide downhill, I lost control, fell into the drain, and became tangled in the *Ugani hambu* vines. The

vines were strong and held me fast, dragging me down, and I could do nothing but struggle. Luckily, someone came to my rescue, pulling me out of the mess. I survived, but not without consequence—my body bears several permanent scars, reminders of those early lessons in determination and the fragility of control. The bicycle, a humble yet significant object, even had a dynamo-powered light, which, in those days, felt like a small luxury, illuminating our path in the dark.

Nearby lived a small Tamil family, settled in a shed. They introduced us and to the entire town 'Boti', a tubelike snack made of rice and Maida, shaped like little tubes. The man—may be his name was 'Armugam' would carry large quantities of Boti on his bicycle, his daily bread tied to the effort of pedaling the same roads that I rode. I can still picture him in his green lungi—traditional Indian casual wear—paired with a black sleeveless vest and a large belt with a pouch. He spent most of his time sitting in front of the fire, tending to the boiling oil. Occasionally, he would offer me freshly made, crispy boties. His presence was a humble reminder of the shared struggles and labors that connected us all, however different our lives seemed.

The 'MA' of Magada³

My father, **Marisiddaiah**, a famous lineman who worked as a daily wager for the State Electricity Board, would ride his bicycle past my classroom every day at exactly 10 a.m. I didn't realize it then, but his presence, like the turning of the clock, symbolized a quiet, enduring struggle. My teacher, noticing this, would say, "See your father... struggling to ride a cycle... *katte baDava*"—a slang term meaning 'useless fellow.' Though harsh, this was his way of motivating me, using my father's visible labor as a reminder that hard work was necessary to rise above such struggles. Every day, I watched my father cross my classroom window, never fully understanding the weight of his burdens or the sheer physical effort he put in just to get by. He used to ride minimum of 12-15 km a day.

³ My surname is an acronym created by combining the first letters of my parents' names and my hometown, "*Dalavayi Kodihalli*".

The concept of the "*Mutton Cheeti*"—A chit fund for buying mutton was a simple, yet ingenious method of saving money for a specific purpose in a time when resources were scarce, and regular indulgences like mutton were considered a luxury. For families with modest means, like ours, the idea of purchasing several kilograms of mutton in one go, particularly for a special occasion, would have been financially burdensome. Hence, my father adopted a practice called the "*Mutton Chit*".

Every year, in preparation for the festival of Ayudhapooja, my father would bring home 3 to 4 kilograms of mutton, along with puffed rice and an assortment of sweets. This was a significant occasion for us, and the food was an essential part of the celebration. But what made it even more special was the way in which my father carefully planned for this feast throughout the year.

The "*Mutton Chit*" was essentially a form of community savings plan, specifically designed to gather enough money over time to afford mutton for such occasions. Every month, my father would contribute a small portion of his earnings to this chit fund. It was a long-term, disciplined commitment—each monthly contribution representing a sacrifice, a postponement of immediate needs, to secure a special feast for the family during Ayudhapooja⁴. This chit fund was likely organized within the local community, where several individuals would pool in money, each receiving their share at a different time, enabling them to purchase goods or cover significant expenses like buying mutton in bulk.

For a poor family, mutton was not something one could afford on a regular basis. It was reserved for special occasions, and even then, buying several kilograms would be an extravagance. The Mutton Chit provided a way to accumulate savings gradually, making it possible to afford this luxury once a year without straining the household's limited budget. This system wasn't just about food—it was about the careful planning and foresight my parents exercised to ensure we could partake in the celebrations with pride and

⁴ Ayudhapooja is a celebration of Goddess Kali's victory over evil and a time to honour the weapons and tools we use in our daily lives.

abundance. We used to raise chickens, but slaughtering one was a rare event, reserved only for the arrival of an important guests or festivals.

On ayudhapooja day, when the mutton finally arrived, it was more than just a meal; it symbolized the fruits of my father's year-long discipline and devotion to his family. The puffed rice and sweets that accompanied the mutton were equally part of this tradition, but the mutton was the highlight—the result of thoughtful, patient saving.

The "*Mutton Chit*" reflects a broader cultural tradition of managing resources and planning ahead in financially constrained households. It highlights how even the simplest joys, like sharing a hearty meal with loved ones, required thoughtful preparation, making the occasion even more meaningful. The mutton feast wasn't just about satisfying hunger; it was a symbol of resilience, community support, and the pride of providing for one's family, even in challenging circumstances.

After completing high school, I enrolled in Government Maharaja College in Mysore, the cultural capital of Karnataka, India. Prior to that, I had attempted to join Marimallappa's College, one of the most prestigious institutions at the time. However, when the principal, Mr. Bettalingaiah, saw my marks card, he refused to give me an appointment. Determined, I waited outside his chamber until he returned from lunch.

Going with my parents to seek admission was never an option due to financial constraints. I used to handle everything on my own, though occasionally my brother Ananda Murthy—who was studying veterinary science, would accompany me, though even that was an expensive endeavor. When I looked at the principal with a sense of disbelief and disappointment, he calmly remarked, "You're not the only one to be rejected," and with pride, he added that he had already turned away many other applicants.

I didn't know what to do after leaving the college, so I simply started walking toward the palace. Along the way, I noticed a sign that read "Mysore International Sales Limited." They were the

producers of "*Lekhak*," a popular notebook at the time. I decided to step inside, even though I didn't know anyone there. My hesitant movements caught the attention of the manager, who called me in. I believe his name was *Somanna*.

I mentioned that I had studied at Gandhi Hostel in Bangalore. To my surprise, his face lit up with happiness. He told me that he, too, had stayed at the same hostel and shared that much of his education took place at Raj Gopalswamy Hostel (RGH) in Srirampur, Bangalore which he described as a sanctuary for underprivileged children. He said he has good network with the schools and colleges across the state. He took it as a challenge and took me to the same Marimallappa's college

We both went straight to the principal's chamber and sat down. Mr. Somanna, using his influence, firmly demanded a seat for me. To my surprise, Mr. Bettalingaiah agreed, but there was an agonizing twist. He offered me a seat in the commerce stream, not the science course I had desperately hoped for. The rejection of my dream felt like a blow, and despite some heated arguments, we left the institute, feeling utterly defeated.

Helpless and frustrated, we made our way to Maharaja's College. The weight of uncertainty was heavy—I hadn't even applied to any institute. I would just walk in with all my documents, hoping for a miracle. With no formal application, it seemed like a long shot, but somehow, I managed to secure a seat. Mr. Rajendra Urs, the principal, was kind enough to accommodate Mr. Somanna's request, but the entire experience left me feeling powerless, with dreams compromised by circumstances beyond my control.

With no choice but to forego the expensive hostel stay, I decided to commute daily from Mandya, a town just 45 kilometers away. Indian Railways had recently introduced two new trains, the 'Cauvery Express' and 'Tippu Express,' vibrant and modern with their colorful seats and lights. Each morning, I would rise, freshen up, and head to catch the train. Sometimes, leftover food from the previous night served as my breakfast, but more often than not, I went hungry. Occasionally, my mother would give me 5 or 10 rupees,

which was a small fortune for us. I would spend 0.75 rupees daily on tea and two biscuits, a simple ritual that the canteen man knew by heart—he never even asked what I wanted; he served me the same thing every day without question.

By 4 p.m., I'd return home, exhausted but grateful for whatever food awaited me. I never complained about the scarcity or lack of variety because I understood the fragile financial situation of my family. My father earned just 600 rupees a month and worked 65 kilo meters away, only coming home once a week or every fortnight. At the same time, two of my brothers were pursuing technical courses—Anandamurthy was studying veterinary science in Bangalore, and Siddaraju was doing engineering at Sri Siddaganga Institute of Technology (SSIT) in Tumkur.

I was astonished to learn that while my engineering brother required 1,200 rupees a month, my veterinary brother needed around 250 to 400 rupees. Yet, we managed. Our humble dairy farming covered the additional costs. Despite the financial strain, I never felt burdened by the sacrifices we had to make. Instead, I saw it as a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of my family. We were bound by an unspoken understanding that our hardships were not setbacks, but stepping stones toward a better future, however distant it may have seemed at the time.

I had an overwhelming desire to prove to myself and to the world that I was capable, competitive, and able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with my peers. Driven by this determination, I joined every club in college, immersing myself in as many activities as possible. One day, during a class, Mrs Lalithakumari, a teacher known for her encouragement, asked if anyone could sing. Without a second thought, I raised my hand. I had no formal training, no experience in classical music, but I had a voice and a heart full of determination. When she asked me to sing a few lines, I chose a simple folk song, something familiar and raw.

The class erupted in laughter. I could feel their mockery like sharp pins against my confidence. But Mrs Lalithakumari, with her kind heart, silenced them and reprimanded those who laughed.

Despite my lack of formal training, she chose me for the college's music group, as if she believed in me more than I believed in myself. It was an act of defiance against the very idea that talent should be confined to rigid definitions.

However, I quickly realized I was out of place. Every other member in the group had formal training in classical music, while I was just a folk singer. I felt like an imposter, a misfit in a world that celebrated technical perfection. Yet, Madam Lalithakumari insisted that I stay, even persuading Srinath, the lead singer who had trained with the legendary Kannada singer Mysore Ananthaswamy, to mentor me. Though I contributed what I could, my presence became more notable because I was Madam Lalithakumari's favorite, rather than for my musical abilities.

I started gaining popularity, not just within my own college but even in other institutions, because I was unafraid to sing during event breaks. Where formally trained singers hesitated, worried about perfection, I embraced the casual nature of those moments and sang from the heart. It didn't take long for me to understand that I couldn't compete with them in the more refined 'Bhavageethe' or Ghazal genres, so I chose to focus on folk songs, the raw music of the people, where I felt most at home.

One of my proudest moments came during a competition at Vidyavardhaka Engineering College in Mysore, where I won first place in the folk song category. However, my joy was short-lived. After the competition, the judges began arguing amongst themselves, claiming that the song I had sung wasn't truly a folk song. The piece I had performed was a philosophical composition by Sant Shishunul Sharif, a revered saint who spread profound messages through his music. While the song had deep roots in culture and philosophy, it didn't fit neatly into their narrow definition of "folk."

I was denied the prize. It felt like a personal defeat, not just for me, but for the spirit of folk music itself. Word of the controversy spread quickly through the college, and soon after, Mrs Devamma Ganapathy, a respected figure, heard about it. She was so moved by the story that she had it published in the 'Mysore Mitra' daily

newspaper, where her husband was the editor. The incident sparked a broader debate among scholars, intellectuals, and music enthusiasts about the fine line between Bhavageethe, a lyrical form akin to Ghazals, and folk music.

This experience taught me a powerful lesson about the rigid boundaries' society places on art and expression. It wasn't just a debate about music genres; it was about the importance of recognizing the soul behind the performance, the raw emotion that transcends labels. In that moment, I realized that while I might never fit the mold of a classical singer, I had something far more valuable—a voice that carried the authenticity of life's struggles, joys, and sorrows. And that, no competition or title could ever take away from me.

One fine day, as I was stepping out of my college, a sea of boys flooded through the narrow collapsible gate. Among us were the mischievous ones—Sharath, Babu, and Krishnegowda—who could make the quietest moments chaotic. Amid the bustle, something caught my eye—a figure in a green uniform, walking toward the college. It was an old 'looking' man. Without thinking, I ran toward him. My heart knew before my eyes could confirm—it was my father.

There he stood, perhaps on some official duty, having taken a moment to see me without any prior communication, only a silent bond of trust. When I reached him, I asked, "How come you're here?" He simply replied, "Yes, is this your college?" I said 'yes', He looked around, pointing to the grand, towering buildings. A quiet pride in his eyes, taking in the scale of the institution where his son studying. No more words were exchanged. We stood there, side by side for about 8-10 minutes, not talking, just being in the moment. Even those mischievous boys came there became emotional and moved on. In that silence, I felt his love and pride, unspoken yet deeply understood. Before he left, he handed me a 10-rupee note. He didn't say much—just a simple gesture of support.

As he walked away, I was left with a mixture of emotions. My father, a simple man, had come to see me in a place so far removed from our humble beginnings, and that small encounter left me feeling

both happy and burdened. I felt proud to be studying in such a prestigious place, yet weighed down by the simplicity of our connection—a few words, a moment shared, and a meager 10 rupees that spoke volumes about his struggle.

As I started my walk toward the railway station, passing landmarks like Maharani's College, Metropole, King's Court, the Tourism Department hotel, and a medical college hostel, tears welled up in my eyes. Each step I took felt heavier. I cried silently, walking along the pedestrian path, overwhelmed by the gap between the grand world I was now a part of and the humble man who had just left. The contrast between the life I was trying to build and the simplicity of my father's world hit me hard.

By the time I reached the station, I was emotionally drained. I boarded the train and, in my exhaustion, fell into a deep sleep. I slept so soundly that I missed my station entirely and ended up far ahead, in a town called Channapatna. When I finally woke up, disoriented and far from where I was supposed to be, I realized I had become a "ticketless traveller." Yet, that entire journey felt like a metaphor—lost in the complexity of my own emotions, journeying further than I had intended, yet finding my way back somehow, carrying the weight of my father's silent pride with me.

Looking back, the image of my father struggling on his bicycle, crossing in front of my classmates, seems far more profound. It wasn't just about riding a bicycle; it was about a man grappling with life, fighting against the currents of hardship to provide for his family. My father's daily ride was not a spectacle but a lesson—one I didn't grasp in the moment but have come to appreciate over time. He may have appeared to be 'struggling,' but in truth, he was showing me what endurance, resilience, and quiet dignity looked like. His struggles, like the scars on my limbs from my own falls, became etched into my understanding of life.

My father's perseverance, much like the Tamil family selling 'Boti,' Mr. Rajendra Urs who granted me a seat in college, or the stranger who saved me from the vines, became my guiding stars. These small acts of resilience, though seemingly ordinary to the world, carried immense weight in shaping my understanding of life.

They weren't just moments of survival—they were profound lessons in humility, persistence, and the quiet strength to rise above adversity.

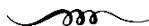
While others might overlook these gestures as insignificant, to me, they stand as silent monuments of courage. Not carved in stone, but etched in the invisible endurance of those who faced life's trials with quiet grace. These moments are reminders that real strength often goes unnoticed, hidden in the everyday struggles of people who simply refuse to give up. It's in these unnoticed sacrifices that the true essence of perseverance lives, forever engraved in the lives they touch.

These events took place four or five decades ago, yet they remain vivid in my memory, as though they happened yesterday. Such memories have a way of lingering because they shape us—they remind us that we are, in many ways, the product of the environment we live in. Every action, every person, every moment leaves an imprint on who we become, and that realization carries profound weight.

The deeper truth in all this is that, while much of our environment is beyond our control, there are moments in life when we can choose the people and surroundings that influence us. These choices are critical. The company we keep, the values we absorb, the perspectives we embrace—they shape the direction of our lives. The underlying message is this: when you have the capacity to choose your environment, especially the people you surround yourself with, choose wisely. Surround yourself with those who lift you, inspire you, and challenge you to grow, for they will determine the quality of your character.

By choosing the right people, you pave the way toward becoming a sensible, compassionate, and responsible person. The right environment fosters growth, just as the wrong one can stifle it. Over time, the values of those around you become the fabric of your own soul. They influence your thoughts, actions, and the very core of who you are. So, choose environments and people that nurture integrity, wisdom, and kindness, for these qualities are the seeds of a life lived with purpose and meaning. Life is a reflection of the choices we make, and in choosing the right environment, we shape not only our present but also the legacy we leave behind.

“You can escape the responsibilities; but you cannot escape the consequence for escaping the responsibilities—Sir Josiah Stamp”



Waves 05

Bangalore Chalo...

I had my sights set on a seat at the prestigious ‘University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore’—a big dream for me at the time. But, you know, life doesn’t always go as planned. So, as a backup, I applied to the legendary GAS College (Estd. 1927), which stood for ‘Government Arts and Science College’ but, in our circles, it was known as the epicenter of notorious students. Imagine a school where discipline had gone on permanent leave, and you’ll get the picture. With no better option available, I reluctantly joined and found myself enrolled in the dreaded **PMSt—Physics, Mathematics, and Statistics**. If ever there were subjects designed to torment me, it was these three! I had been allergic to them since my school days, and now I was stuck suffering through them again. My older brother, Anandamurthy, had a much more agreeable lineup of subjects: CBZG—Chemistry, Biology, Zoology, and Geography. Lucky him.

I ended up staying at the famous Government General Hostel (GGH), right on MG Road, next to the popular kids' clothing store ‘Kids Kemp’. If you think that’s an odd pairing, wait till you hear about the hostel. It had all the charm of a prison cafeteria, with food that could make you rethink your life choices. But the location was unbeatable—right next to Somerset Apartments, the posh residence of Bangalore's elite at the time.

The one thing that kept our spirits up was the daily bus ride on the iconic double-decker buses that cruised down MG Road. The views were spectacular, and it almost made you forget that you had to return to a pile of statistical equations. Our college was located on Nrupatunga Road, just across from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Attached to GAS college was the famous University of Visveswaraya Engineering College (UVCE)—the first engineering college in the state started in the year 1917. This part of town had some pretty decent eateries like Kamath Café and Hotel Tripti, conveniently positioned at the end of the road near the Police Head Quarters offices.

Now, here's where my smartness kicked in. I discovered that the RBI had a canteen with food that was miles better than what our hostel served—and at a bargain price. The trick was getting in. Naturally, I took a bold approach. I casually informed the watchman that my brother worked at the RBI, which wasn't true, but close enough to convince him. I'd stroll in, take the lift, and enjoy my breakfast like I owned the place. Using lift itself was a great pride. Soon, word got around, and other students tried to follow my lead. Unfortunately, they weren't as smooth and got caught. They didn't know the secret was in charming the watchman first.

Of course, my lucky streak didn't last forever. Many in the canteen used to look at me weird. They must have informed the watchman. After a few weeks, I was caught too. But, not one to be outdone, I quickly spun a heartfelt tale about my poor family background and how I couldn't afford food outside. While the story was true, I exaggerated it just enough to keep the watchman from barring me for good. He must've had a soft spot for me because he let me continue to enjoy the best food in town at the lowest price.

Student's Union

The college union election was a real eye-opener for me, especially in terms of leadership, networking, and management. Inspired by my brother's stories, I decided to contest from my batch. But little did I know that I was stepping into the world of college

politics—a place where alliances, deals, and backroom negotiations were as important as the votes themselves.

One day, Jagadish, who was running for president, approached me. He was one of the more notorious figures on campus, well-known for his influence. He took me to Hotel Tripti, where we had a feast of good food. Over the meal, he asked me to withdraw my candidacy and support his run instead. I wasn't in a strong position myself, having no solid gang of supporters and coming from a hostel where most of my peers were from humble, poor backgrounds. These were good-hearted people, but they were more used to fighting among themselves than taking on any external competition.

Recognizing the limitations of my own situation, I agreed to back Jagadish. I realized then that leadership wasn't just about having the loudest voice but knowing 'when to align yourself with the right people and create opportunities for collaboration.' Despite the fact that I withdrew, I didn't just disappear into the background. Instead, I took it as an opportunity to embed myself within Jagadish's network and became surprisingly popular for no clear reason other than my newfound associations.

A few years earlier, my brother had served as Joint Secretary in the same college, and he often shared thrilling stories of rowdiness, elections, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Those tales planted the seeds in my mind, sparking a curiosity about the complex workings of power and influence. Even though I had pulled out of the race, I found myself preparing Jagadish's campaign speech—an irony that wasn't lost on me. I put my heart into drafting his words, as if I were running for president myself. What I was learning was the power of influence behind the scenes. Leadership isn't always about being the face of the team; sometimes, it's about shaping the message and moving the right levers.

I took on an active role in campaigning for Jagadish's team, going class to class, speaking with boldness, and building a network for him. I was relentless in my efforts, even though I was probably the only hostelite involved in the election process. Some of my peers from more affluent backgrounds had mopeds and bikes, while I relied

on sheer determination and charisma. This didn't stop me—it only fueled my drive. I saw the election as a microcosm of management, where resources, strategy, and timing played crucial roles.

In the mid 1980s, college elections were a spectacle of their own—complete with chaos, rivalry, and wild celebrations. I remember it clearly—on the result day, the campus atmosphere was electric. The votes were being counted, and announcements were blaring through the loudspeakers. It was a tense wait, but we had a feeling our candidate, Jagga, was going to win. We were all outside, huddled together, ready with crackers in hand for a celebration that would shake the college.

I was just a small figure in this big, boisterous crowd, but my attitude made up for what I lacked in size. I was ready for whatever came next. When the final count was announced and Jagga was declared the winner, the crowd erupted in cheers. Firecrackers were lit, and the noise was deafening. But not everyone was thrilled—Shivanna, the opposing candidate, took the news pretty hard. In a fit of anger, he stormed over to the main door and smashed the glass. It was chaos, but the police were already prepared. A van full of police swooped in and swiftly arrested him and his group of supporters.

Meanwhile, we basked in our victory, taking over Nripatunga Road, parading and shouting with joy. The whole Nripatunga—one of the busiest roads was blocked. I still don't know how it happened, but students from other colleges began joining us. It was as if our win had sparked some collective euphoria across campus boundaries. The crowd swelled, and suddenly, it felt like the entire student population of Bangalore was with us.

We all headed to a Tripti hotel which was at the end of the Nripatunga road, where tables were laid out with snacks. We indulged in everything—samosas, vadas, coffee—and the best part? No one bothered to ask for the bill. The generosity was overwhelming, and it wasn't because we could afford it. Most of us came from humble backgrounds; paying for even these snacks would've been a stretch. But on that day, none of that mattered. The spirit of the moment was bigger than the limitations of our wallets.

In fact, it feels surreal—how quickly life moved, how crazy yet thrilling it was to be caught up in such moments. I didn't have much, but what I did have was an endless curiosity to explore every facet of life. The streets of Bangalore, the camaraderie of students, the thrill of victory—all of it fueled the adventurer in me.

In a sense, it was my first lesson in managing people and expectations. I learned that true leadership often involves understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team, knowing how to influence decisions without being in the spotlight, and most importantly, recognizing when to step aside for the greater good. By supporting Jagadish and crafting his campaign, I was mastering the art of quiet leadership—working from behind the scenes to create impact without the need for personal glory.

Life is a delicate balance of grit, wit, and timing. It's not about always sticking rigidly to the truth, but about understanding when to adapt, when to be strategic. As they say, **'Pure gold is always soft without the copper.'** In the same way, a person who is too rigid in their principles may struggle to survive in a world that often demands a certain level of flexibility. Sometimes, you need to blend a bit of cunning with honesty—just enough to navigate without causing harm.

My roommate in the hostel was Subhash, hailing from Gulbarga in North Karnataka, and he was absolutely obsessed with 'Karate.' It was all he talked about, day in and day out. He even dragged me to a few Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan films—names like 'Armor of the God,' 'Enter the Dragon' and 'Break Dance' still ring a bell. We were on the second floor of the hostel, and Subhash would often practice his karate moves on the roof, probably imagining himself as the next Bruce Lee.

Now, our room window faced the Somerset apartments, and Subhash, in his karate-fueled craziness, decided to reflect light from a mirror onto the balcony where some girls were hanging out. Apparently, he did this one too many times, because the next thing I knew, their furious parents had hired some local thugs to teach us a lesson.

Completely clueless about Subhash's antics, I was blindsided when one fine day, a group of tough guys barged into our room and smashed everything in sight. By the time we gathered our team, our belongings were wrecked. Fortunately, Subhash wasn't around for the beating. We somehow managed to shoo them away, and after that, Subhash was promptly moved to another room.

As for me? Well, let's just say I seemed to have a knack for being close to drama, yet always managing to avoid getting directly caught in the storm. Scandals seemed to swirl around me, but they never quite stuck!

The Statistics

I was eagerly waiting for a 'selection letter' from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, hoping it would arrive any day now. Meanwhile, I'd been at the GAS College for nearly five months, and despite my anticipation, I wasn't quite ready to let go of the strange yet oddly comforting chaos of campus life.

The real torture during my time there was Mr. Pakal, our statistics teacher. To this day, I can't remember his full name, but the trauma of his classes is permanently etched into my mind. He was, without a doubt, the most horrible, horrifying, terrible, and irritating teacher I'd ever encountered. The man had a knack for demoralizing students like it was his personal mission. He would say, with a grim satisfaction, "You'll never pass my course and you'll never succeed in life." He didn't reserve this gloomy prophecy just for me, either—he told it to half the class! Instead of inspiring us to do better, he seemed to relish in planting doubt and fear.

On the flip side, the college also had some truly amazing teachers. One standout was Dr K.S. Nisar Ahmed, the famous Kannada poet who wrote classics like "Nithyotsava." He was tough, yes, but at least he was fair and reasonable. He taught geography, and even though he had a strict demeanor, you could manage his classes without feeling like your soul was being crushed. Then there was Mr. Mahadevappa, the barefoot mathematician. A humble, godly man, he would stroll into class without shoes and teach math with a calmness that was a balm for our stressed minds. His famous line,

which he'd repeat to comfort struggling students, was: "*Even without mathematics, you can live... don't worry.*" Now that was the kind of teacher who made you believe you had a future, even if you couldn't solve an equation!

Then, one fine day, a telegram arrived informing me that I needed to attend a practical class for my 'Agriculture Seat.' I thought this was it—the golden moment! I celebrated, convinced that I'd secured my seat at the University of Agricultural Sciences.

Feeling bold, and with one foot already out of the door, my friends encouraged me to finally do what no one else had dared—tell Mr. Pakal that his teaching methods were a disaster. Since I was ready to leave the college, I figured why not go out with a bang? So, in what I knew would be my last statistics class, I raised my hand and said, "*Sir, can you change your method of teaching so that everyone can understand?*"

Without missing a beat, Pakal shot back, "*I am doing Bharatanatyam; how can you expect me to do breakdance?*"

The whole class erupted in laughter, but I wasn't done. I smiled and replied, "*Sir, even in Bharatanatyam, you can change the steps.*"

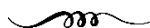
The laughter doubled. Everyone was in stitches.

Pakal, trying to save face, retorted, "*Better to change the college.*"

And just like that, I knew I'd be leaving on a high note. If nothing else, I left behind a classroom full of students who knew that even in the dreariest of situations, sometimes a bit of wit could change everything.

Life at GAS College wasn't luxurious by any means, but it taught me this valuable lesson: not every challenge can be faced head-on; some require a bit of maneuvering. And so, I made it a point to turn obstacles to my advantage, even if it sometimes required telling harmless lies or blunt truths. That's the reality of life—it's not about being flawless, it's about being resourceful and knowing when to bend without breaking.

“If you can’t fly, then run. If you can’t run, then walk. If you can’t walk, then crawl, but by all means, keep moving—Martin Luther King Jr”



Waves 06

The Cowboy Again...

There was a time when education wasn't just a pursuit, but a battle—a constant struggle against circumstance, poverty, and the crushing weight of helplessness. Back then, there was a concept called ‘Tuition’—extra classes outside of school where students went to better understand subjects that challenged them. For many, these classes were essential. But for me, they were a luxury that life didn’t afford.

The cost of tuition was Rs. 400 per subject. To most, it might seem like a reasonable price, but for my family, it was overwhelming. Rs. 400 was the entirety of my father’s monthly salary. How could I justify spending that much on something that wasn’t food or shelter? How could I ask for help when it would mean pushing my family deeper into hardship? With a heavy heart, I refused to join the tuition classes, telling myself that I could manage, that I would pass the exams without it. But deep down, I knew I was lying to myself.

Mathematics and physics—those subjects felt like mountains I had to climb with broken legs. The concepts of integration, differentiation, and calculus seemed like foreign languages, and I was lost in the wilderness of numbers and symbols. My struggles were compounded by the fact that, until 10th grade, I had studied in the Kannada medium. Suddenly, at the college level, the medium of instruction had switched to English. It was as if the very foundation beneath me had shifted, and I was standing on unstable ground.

I still remember the English teacher, but only her face. Beyond that, her lessons were a blur. Her words fell on deaf ears, not because I didn't want to learn, but because I couldn't. I was drowning in a sea of unfamiliar terms and concepts. Every day, I felt the weight of failure pressing down on me, and the more I tried to stay afloat, the more I sank.

But in the midst of this struggle, there was a beacon of light—my friend, Lakshmikanth. He stayed in another hostel at Saraswathipuram, Mysore, and he, too, attended the same classes as me. But unlike me, Lakshmikanth had joined the tuition classes. He sat attentively through the sessions, absorbing the material that felt impossible to me. At times, I used to go to '*Anaathalya*'—a separate hostel for brahmins near Shanthala theatre to discuss the subjects with some of the bright students.

Lakshmikanth could have left me to fend for myself, but instead, he extended a hand of friendship. He tried his best to explain the concepts that haunted me—the mysteries of integration, differentiation, and calculus. I could see the effort in his eyes, the patience in his voice, and the empathy in his heart. He knew I was struggling, and though he couldn't fix my problems entirely, he was there—doing what little he could to help me understand.

Every time he explained something, I felt a mixture of gratitude and guilt. Gratitude for his kindness, for the time he spent trying to make things clearer. But guilt too, for I knew I was still barely managing. I felt like a burden, unable to grasp the very things he was trying so hard to teach me.

As the exams loomed closer, I often lay awake at night, staring at the ceiling, wondering if I'd made a terrible mistake by refusing tuition. The fear of failure gnawed at me constantly. I wasn't just worried about disappointing myself—I was terrified of disappointing my family, who had sacrificed so much for me already. How could I face them if I failed? In those moments, it was not just about education anymore. It was about survival, about a future that felt uncertain and out of reach.

101 Chemicals

There were some truly legendary teachers during my time in college. Take Mr. K R Yoganand, for instance, the physics teacher. He had this almost mystical ability to turn even the simplest of experiments into something that seemed like it required a Ph.D. in rocket science. Then there was Mr. P Papanna for botany—old, wise, and probably stricter than the laws of thermodynamics. He had the demeanor of a man who could, with a single glance, make even the toughest plants in the botanical world wilt out of sheer fear.

Oh, and let's not forget Mrs. G. S. Prabha for zoology! She could talk about amphibians with such passion that you might have thought she had a secret pet frog at home. Mr. Mahadevaiah for chemistry—now there was a man who could discuss compounds like he was discussing the weather. And Mrs. Subbalakshmi, our Kannada teacher, who somehow managed to make poetry out of every grammatical rule. Finally, there was Ms. Naveena Begum for English who used come in a Luna—a moped of those days. She had a calm elegance about her, but sadly, the only thing I remember about her was her face. The English words flew over my head like a fast-moving train.

But the classrooms, now those were something else. They weren't just rooms; they were masterpieces. They felt like something straight out of a European university brochure. The seating arrangements were sloped, so even if you sat at the back, you felt like you were on top of the world. The desks were intricately designed, and the dais at the front was so pristine and grand, it could've hosted a Nobel lecture. Honestly, the setup was ideal for learning—just not for someone like me, who wasn't quite equipped to grasp all the high-level scientific explanations they were dishing out.

Yet, despite my academic struggles, I was quite inventive. You see, I had this knack for finding creative shortcuts to "understand" science. I wasn't great at the whole memorization thing, but my imagination was always in overdrive. Take Mr. Papanna's class, for example. The man was a living encyclopedia, and he ran his classroom like a well-oiled machine—no room for nonsense.

One day, he was lecturing on the elements. Back then, there were 101 elements—now it's 118, but who's counting? Anyway, he was trying to explain all these complicated chemical reactions and the various by-products they produced. My brain was already spinning from all the formulas, and out of nowhere, this wild idea popped into my head. I thought, "*What would happen if we threw all these elements into one giant barrel and stirred them up?*" The thought itself was so absurd that I couldn't help but whisper it to my friend Lakshmikanth.

Now, Lakshmikanth wasn't exactly known for his poker face. He burst out laughing—right in the middle of Papanna's lecture. The next thing we knew, Papanna had gone from explaining the elements to turning into an Olympian-level discus thrower. He launched his wooden duster with such precision that it hit Lakshmikanth square on the forehead. I swear, the man could've had a second career in athletics. Poor Lakshmikanth was left bleeding from the impact, but there he was, still trying to explain to Mr. Papanna that it wasn't his fault—I was the one with the harebrained idea!

Of course, in all the chaos that followed, I somehow escaped punishment. Lakshmikanth's injury became the focus, and my out-of-the-box thinking went under the radar. But that's just how I was, always dreaming up unconventional ideas—ones that often had unintended consequences. And you know what? That out-of-the-box thinking hasn't changed one bit. It's been my constant companion, helping me navigate life, even if it meant occasionally dodging wooden dusters.

10 km for a small lunch

During exam time, I made a decision to stay in Mysore, hoping that the change in environment might somehow push me into a more productive rhythm. It was a decision borne out of desperation, as I was struggling to keep up with the syllabus and drowning under the weight of subjects that seemed to get more incomprehensible by the day. Through a vague and unreliable network, I managed to secure a bed in Mallanna's Hostel, which, back then, was situated in Kuvempu Nagar—a place that's now a posh locality in Mysore. But

back then, it was just a modest area, and the hostel was no palace either.

Through my brother, Anandamurthy's connections, I was also given a rare opportunity to stay at the degree hostel on Ramanuja Road, near Ramaswamy Circle, Mysore. It felt like a stroke of luck—at least I had a place to crash. But as with all things in life, there was a catch. I wasn't officially enrolled there, so I wasn't eligible to have food in the hostel mess. And let me tell you, the situation got absurdly severe.

Every single day, I had to walk nearly five kilo meters to the hostel just to grab a bite of food—well, calling it a “bite” would be generous. It was more like a small helping of rice and some watery curry that barely filled the plate, let alone my stomach. But that walk—it was torture. By the time I made the five-kilometer trek back, my body was so exhausted that the thought of making the same trip again for dinner was unbearable. So, I didn't. Dinner became a distant dream. Most nights, I simply went without, surviving on water, gulp after gulp, trying to trick my stomach into thinking it was full. Occasionally, if I had a little extra pocket change, I'd treat myself to a cream bun or a piece of toast from Krishna Bakery at Ramaswamy Circle, just to hold off the hunger pangs. But that was rare—a luxury.

And the hostel? It was a madhouse. The seniors there were a rough-and-tumble lot, a group of guys who seemed to have their own absurd version of a routine. They spent their nights staying up until dawn, talking loudly, going out to catch the second show at the local cinema, and returning with endless stories about the movie. But that wasn't the worst of it. They would spend hours reading what they called “literature”—but it was anything but that. These were sleazy sex books, smuggled in and passed around like treasure. When they weren't reading those, they were recounting their wildest love stories, each one more exaggerated and absurd than the last. They lived in this perpetual loop of nocturnal chaos—talking, laughing, watching, and reading—and then they'd wake up the next day and do it all over again.

For me, though, it was a different kind of chaos. I wasn't part of their nightly escapades. My nights were spent wrestling with textbooks, trying to cram equations and theories into a mind that was already exhausted from hunger and the never-ending walks. I was trying to learn in an environment that seemed more like a circus than a place of study.

In those moments, the absurdity of the situation hit me hard. I was trying to prepare for exams, trying to better myself in an environment that was anything but conducive to learning. Walking miles for a handful of rice, skipping meals because the distance was too far, and trying to sleep while the hostel echoed with the sounds of laughter, film reviews, and off-color stories—it was a bizarre contradiction. But I didn't have much of a choice. I had to adapt. And somehow, amidst all the absurdity, I learned to push through, even if it meant surviving on nothing but water and the occasional cream bun.

That experience didn't just teach me about academics—it taught me sociology of managing varieties of people, the kind that comes when your situation is so absurd and severe that you either laugh at it or get crushed by it. And I chose to laugh, push forward, and survive—because that's all I could do.

One day, I was suffering from a terrible fever, feeling completely drained and unable to focus on anything. I was sharing my room with Vivekananda at the time. He spent most of his days at our home, and we had that kind of understanding—he was someone I could rely on when needed. I asked for his support, and he helped as much as he could. But as my fever worsened, he started worrying about his own situation. With exams looming the next day, he became more concerned about catching the fever himself. Finally, he asked me to leave and find somewhere else to stay, just to avoid getting sick.

So, I went out, weak and disoriented, and ended up staying in some unfamiliar room. I didn't study at all that night. The whole experience felt humiliating—being pushed aside in my time of need, treated as though I was an inconvenience. I did not even tell him that even I had the exams. These kinds of insults and humiliations weren't

new to me, but they stung deeply every time. However, instead of letting them break me, they fueled something bigger within me. They made me think, made me dream, and most importantly, they made me determined to rise above.

I'm not saying this now with the benefit of hindsight or as a boast after many years. Even back then, I made it clear to them, time and time again, that I would become a Gazetted Officer, the kind who signs with green ink. It wasn't just wishful thinking or something I said in passing—it was a firm belief I held and openly expressed. I wanted them to know that my dreams were not empty words. I had the conviction that, despite the challenges and the dismissiveness from others, I would rise to that position.

It wasn't about showing off or making bold claims for attention; it was about putting my aspirations into the world with the confidence that I would make them real. Those words weren't meant to impress anyone—they were a reflection of my inner drive and the clarity I had about my future. Every time I spoke those words, it wasn't with arrogance, but with purpose. I wasn't just imagining a better life; I was actively setting a course for it.

Home 'Alone'!

After that incident, I made up my mind to rent a small house for a couple of months. It was more about survival than anything else, so I set out to find something affordable. That's how I ended up in '*Paduvaralli*', a densely populated village within Mysore city. The area was far from fancy, crowded with narrow lanes and tiled houses stacked next to each other. But it had a certain charm of its own. I managed to find a modest place that fit my budget.

To make things even more affordable, I invited a friend of mine to share the space with me. He was studying the same subjects, though he was at a different college. Between the two of us, we figured out how to keep our heads above water. Cooking became a necessity, and we learned how to make simple meals—rice and black gram curry being our staple. Most days, curd rice became our go-to meal, a comfort in its simplicity. When we managed to make *chitranna*, a spicy lemon rice dish, it felt like a luxury—a break from

the monotony of our everyday meals. This irregular and poor diet resulted in severe gastritis, which I was eventually able to manage with a better diet plan after turning 40.

Our daily life wasn't glamorous. Much of our time was spent fixing that stubborn kerosene stove or scrubbing our utensils clean. It was far from easy, but somehow, we managed to make it work. The house was small, and the area was always alive with noise. The streets were bustling with people gossiping outside their homes, seemingly always embroiled in some petty argument over trivial things. The sounds of laughter, disputes, and everyday life filled the air constantly.

Despite the crowded environment and the occasional squabbles, the people of Paduvaralli had something truly special about them. They were simple, humble folks, rooted in their way of life, and full of empathy. While they may have fought over the smallest things, they had hearts big enough to make a newcomer like me feel welcome. They didn't know much about me, but the fact that I was new to the neighborhood was enough for them to extend their kindness. Every time I stepped outside, they would greet me warmly, a smile or a nod, as if I had been part of their world for years.

I quickly realized that beneath the noise and the seeming chaos, there was a deep sense of community in *Paduvaralli*. These were people who led simple lives, focused on the small joys and hardships of everyday existence. They might not have had much in the way of material wealth, but their generosity and warmth were boundless. Their kindness wasn't about grand gestures—it was in the little things, the greetings, the occasional help, the sense that even though I was a stranger, I wasn't alone.

Living among them, I learned that simplicity didn't mean a lack of depth. It meant appreciating the small things, the everyday moments, and finding beauty in them. These people taught me humility, and they showed me what it truly meant to have a great heart. And for that brief time, as tough as it was, I felt like I was part of something larger—a community that, despite its struggles, knew how to care for one another.

There lived my mother's relatives in the same locality. The kids of my relatives were Aravind, Arjun, and Akash were all too small of 3-5 years of age group. The present-day cinema star 'Yash' used to join them. I was told about these when he attended Deepika's marriage who is the daughter of my eldest brother Basavaraju.

The Exams

The first exam in my second year of pre-university was physics, and let me tell you, I was terrified. My heart was pounding like it was trying to escape from my chest. As soon as I stepped into the exam hall, there was chaos everywhere. Students were buzzing about how some of the questions were supposedly "out of syllabus." I thought to myself, *That's it. I'm done for.* The fear took over, and I just muddled my way through the exam, barely holding it together. And with that same sense of impending doom, I dragged myself through all the other exams as well.

Two months later, when the results were about to be announced, I was anything but eager. In fact, I wasn't even waiting for them with any hope. On the result day, I got up and dramatically declared, "I'm off to Mysore to check the results. If I fail, I'll head straight to Nanjangud temple and shave my head as an offering to Lord Nanjundeshwara. But if by some miracle I pass, I'll return home with every hair intact!" I had it all planned out.

I reached the college and made my way to the notice board where everyone had gathered. The atmosphere was tense. You could feel the mix of excitement and dread, but mostly dread, because only a handful of people were celebrating. As I scanned the list, there it was—my name, with a big fat "F" next to physics and mathematics. Failed in two subjects! I stood there for a moment, taking it in. But I had already prepared myself mentally, so I didn't feel crushed. I thought, *shaving my head is not going to solve anything*, so I decided to keep my hair and my dignity intact and just head back home.

When I got back, my parents asked me how the results went. I gave them a sly smile and pointed to my fully intact hair, still on my head. They figured I had passed. But I knew I couldn't keep the truth hidden for long. So, for the next three or four days, I started telling

them exaggerated stories about students who had failed and even gone as far as committing suicide because of it. I wanted to mentally prepare them for the news I was about to drop. They listened, concerned, and eventually, I eased into the confession—*Well, I failed in two subjects*. By that time, they weren't even shocked. My dramatics had given them enough of a warning.

That summer, my brother Anandamurthy came back home, and another brother, Siddaraju, joined him. Together, they must've had a family meeting and decided that my academic future wasn't looking too bright. So, what did they do? They increased the number of cattle we had, like they were preparing for my inevitable career shift. Every morning and evening, I was tasked with taking two cows to the dairy, which was a kilometer away. It wasn't the distance that bothered me, but the humiliation of walking back home in the evening, seeing my friends returning from college. They weren't even in my college, but just knowing they were continuing with their studies while I was stuck ferrying cows felt like the ultimate insult.

The whole experience was like some twisted comedy. My grand declarations, the dramatic way I tried to soften the blow for my parents, and the reality of having to deal with the cows instead of physics—it all seemed absurd. But, in a way, it shaped me. Sure, I failed those exams, but I didn't let it break me. And no matter what, I kept my hair! Even now at 56.

I had finally decided to buckle down and study properly. No more excuses, I told myself. So, in an attempt to look like a serious student, I went and bought a few 'digests'—those handy little books filled with model questions and answers. I even borrowed a few more textbooks to create the illusion of being really studious. I mean, what could go wrong with a pile of books? To complete the look, I started going to the sugar factory park. It was peaceful there, a perfect spot to study...or so I thought.

For the first few days, I actually did manage to open the books. But then, the inevitable happened—after lunch, I would be hit by the kind of sleep that you just can't resist. The warmth of the afternoon sun and the full stomach were a deadly combo, and more often than

not, I'd end up dozing off. Many evenings, the park's watchman had to come and wake me up, probably wondering why this so-called "student" kept treating the park like his personal bedroom.

One day, I had just walked out of our humble shed—a thatched house we had built after shifting to Mandya post my 6th standard. You see, even though we had lived in a bungalow-like house in Shivapura, when we moved, we built this little house with coconut leaves and covered it with a thick mat of typha, an aquatic weed. It was simple but cozy. Anyway, I'd dozed off again on the *jagali*—a cement structure in front of the house where people usually sit and relax. As I was blissfully asleep, I suddenly felt a hard smack. I woke up, startled, and without even looking, I said, "Oh, it's you, watchman. I was just about to wake up!"

To my horror, it wasn't the watchman. It was my brother Siddaraju. He had caught on to my little routine of snoozing in the park and had come to give me a wake-up call—literally! He wasn't impressed, to say the least, and after that, he started teaching me himself from time to time, keeping an eye on my "studies" to make sure I wasn't just sleeping through my exam preparations.

When the supplementary exams finally rolled around, I made the bold decision to tackle just one subject at a time. It was a bit of a risky strategy, but I figured it was better than spreading myself too thin. So, I took on **mathematics** for the supplementary exam and left **physics** for the regular annual exam. Somehow, by the grace of the education gods, I managed to clear both. And the icing on the cake? I scored **66** in mathematics, which was the highest score I got in any subject!

The core of what I'm trying to convey here is simple yet profound: insults must inspire you; they must light a fire within you, push you forward instead of holding you back. When people mock or doubt you, when circumstances make you feel small, these moments must become the fuel that drives you toward something greater. Insults must make you responsible—they force you to reflect, to rise above, and to take control of your own destiny, rather than sinking under the weight of others' judgments. And most importantly,

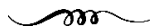
insults must make you dream big. Because when you feel the sting of being underestimated or ridiculed, it's in those moments that you should start imagining something far beyond what others can see for you.

I remember on result day, after clearing my exams, I went to the dairy and boldly told the owner Mr. Narayana, "This is the last day I'm coming here." It wasn't arrogance; it was confidence. A quiet, steady belief that I was on the verge of something bigger, that I had earned my place in the world. This wasn't just about exams or grades; it was about a shift in how I saw myself and what I was capable of achieving.

That's the kind of confidence I want you to have—where the insults and doubts of others no longer wound you but instead become stepping stones on your path. It's about taking every hit, every moment of doubt, and transforming it into something that propels you forward. There is no greater victory than proving wrong those who doubted you—not through vengeance, but through the quiet triumph of achieving what you always believed you could.

In the end, life is full of small defeats and challenges. The question is, will they break you, or will they make you stronger? Every insult, every setback, is a test of your resolve. If you let it, each of these moments can shape you into a more determined, more resilient version of yourself—someone who is not just surviving, but thriving. That's the mindset I want you to cultivate: **Insults are not obstacles; they are ques for you to open new opportunities.** They are reminders that your story is still unfolding, and your greatest achievements are yet to come. I am adhering to the principles mentioned in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. I decided not to simply accept life as it came, but to write my own story. That's the story you're going through now.

*“Science doesn't change every day; it's our understanding that evolves —
Magada”*



Waves 07

The GAS College...

I had my sights set on a seat at the prestigious University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore—a big dream for me at the time. But, you know, life doesn't always go as planned. So, as a backup, I applied to the legendary GAS College (Estd. 1927), which stood for Government Arts and Science College but, in our circles, it was known as the epicenter of notorious students. Imagine a school where discipline had gone on permanent leave, and you'll get the picture. With no better option available, I reluctantly joined and found myself enrolled in the dreaded PMSt—Physics, Mathematics, and Statistics. If ever there were subjects designed to torment me, it was these three! I had been allergic to them since my school days, and now I was stuck suffering through them again. My older brother, Anandamurthy, had a much more agreeable lineup of subjects: CBZG—Chemistry, Biology, Zoology, and Geography. Lucky him.

I ended up staying at the famous Government General Hostel (GGH), right on MG Road, next to the popular kids' clothing store Kids Kemp. If you think that's an odd pairing, wait till you hear about the hostel. It had all the charm of a prison cafeteria, with food that could make you rethink your life choices. But the location was unbeatable—right next to Somerset Apartments, the posh residence of Bangalore's elite at the time.

The one thing that kept our spirits up was the daily bus ride on the iconic double-decker buses that cruised down MG Road. The

views were spectacular, and it almost made you forget that you had to return to a pile of statistical equations. Our college was located on Nrupatunga Road, just across from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Attached to GAS college was the famous University of Visveswaraya Engineering College (UVCE)—the first engineering college in the state started in the year 1917. This part of town had some pretty decent eateries like Kamath Café and Hotel Tripti, conveniently positioned at the end of the road near the state police offices.

Now, here's where my smartness kicked in. I discovered that the RBI had a canteen with food that was miles better than what our hostel served—and at a bargain price. The trick was getting in. Naturally, I took a bold approach. I casually informed the watchman that my brother worked at the RBI, which wasn't true, but close enough to convince him. I'd stroll in, take the lift, and enjoy my breakfast like I owned the place. Using lift itself was a great pride. Soon, word got around, and other students tried to follow my lead. Unfortunately, they weren't as smooth and got caught. They didn't know the secret was in charming the watchman first.

Of course, my lucky streak didn't last forever. Many in the canteen used to look at me weird. They must have informed the watchman. After a few weeks, I was caught too. But, not one to be outdone, I quickly spun a heartfelt tale about my poor family background and how I couldn't afford food outside. While the story was true, I exaggerated it just enough to keep the watchman from barring me for good. He must've had a soft spot for me because he let me continue to enjoy the best food in town at the lowest price.

The college union election was a real eye-opener for me, especially in terms of leadership, networking, and management. Inspired by my brother's stories, I decided to contest from my batch. But little did I know that I was stepping into the world of college politics—a place where alliances, deals, and backroom negotiations were as important as the votes themselves.

One day, Jagadish, who was running for president, approached me. He was one of the more notorious figures on campus, well-known for his influence and notoriousness. He took me to Hotel Tripti,

where we had a feast of good food. Over the meal, he asked me to withdraw my candidacy and support his run instead. I wasn't in a strong position myself, having no solid gang of supporters and coming from a hostel where most of my peers were from humble, poor backgrounds. These were good-hearted people, but they were more used to fighting among themselves than taking on any external competition.

Recognizing the limitations of my own situation, I agreed to back Jagadish. I realized then that leadership wasn't just about having the loudest voice but knowing 'when to align yourself with the right people and create opportunities for collaboration.' Despite the fact that I withdrew, I didn't just disappear into the background. Instead, I took it as an opportunity to embed myself within Jagadish's network and became surprisingly popular for no clear reason other than my newfound associations.

A few years earlier, my brother had served as Joint Secretary in the same college, and he often shared thrilling stories of rowdiness, elections, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Those tales planted the seeds in my mind, sparking a curiosity about the complex workings of power and influence. Even though I had pulled out of the race, I found myself preparing Jagadish's campaign speech—an irony that wasn't lost on me. I put my heart into drafting his words, as if I were running for president myself. What I was learning was the power of influence behind the scenes. Leadership isn't always about being the face of the team; sometimes, it's about shaping the message and moving the right levers.

I took on an active role in campaigning for Jagadish's team, going class to class, speaking with boldness, and building a network for him. I was relentless in my efforts, even though I was probably the only hostelite involved in the election process. Some of my peers from more affluent backgrounds had mopeds and bikes, while I relied on sheer determination and charisma. This didn't stop me—it only fueled my drive. I saw the election as a microcosm of management, where resources, strategy, and timing played crucial roles.

In the mid 1980s, college elections were a spectacle of their own—complete with chaos, rivalry, and wild celebrations, just like a political election. I remember it clearly—on the result day, the campus atmosphere was electric. The votes were being counted, and announcements were blaring through the loudspeakers. It was a tense wait, but we had a feeling our candidate, Jagga, was going to win. We were all outside, huddled together, ready with crackers in hand for a celebration that would shake the college.

I was just a small figure in this big, boisterous crowd, but my attitude made up for what I lacked in size. I was ready for whatever came next. When the final count was announced and Jagga was declared the winner, the crowd erupted in cheers. Firecrackers were lit, and the noise was deafening. But not everyone was thrilled—Shivanna, the opposing candidate, took the news pretty hard. In a fit of anger, he stormed over to the main door and smashed the glass. It was chaos, but the police were already prepared. A van full of police swooped in and swiftly arrested him and his group of supporters.

Meanwhile, we basked in our victory, taking over Nripatunga Road, parading and shouting with joy. The whole Nripatunga—one of the busiest roads was blocked. I still don't know how it happened, but students from other colleges began joining us. It was as if our win had sparked some collective euphoria across campus boundaries. The crowd swelled, and suddenly, it felt like the entire student population of Bangalore was with us.

We all headed to a Tripti hotel which was at the end of the Nripatunga road, where tables were laid out with snacks. We indulged in everything—samosas, vadas, coffee—and the best part? No one bothered to ask for the bill. The generosity was overwhelming, and it wasn't because we could afford it. Most of us came from humble backgrounds; paying for even these snacks would've been a stretch. But on that day, none of that mattered. The spirit of the moment was bigger than the limitations of our wallets.

In fact, it feels surreal—how quickly life moved, how crazy yet thrilling it was to be caught up in such moments. I didn't have much, but what I did have was an endless curiosity to explore every facet

of life. The streets of Bangalore, the camaraderie of students, the thrill of victory—all of it fueled the adventurer in me.

In a sense, it was my first lesson in managing people and expectations. I learned that true leadership often involves understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team, knowing how to influence decisions without being in the spotlight, and most importantly, recognizing when to step aside for the greater good. By supporting Jagadish and crafting his campaign, I was mastering the art of quiet leadership—working from behind the scenes to create impact without the need for personal glory.

Life is a delicate balance of grit, wit, and timing. It's not about always sticking rigidly to the truth, but about understanding when to adapt, when to be strategic. As they say, **'Pure gold is always soft without the copper.'** In the same way, a person who is too rigid in their principles may struggle to survive in a world that often demands a certain level of flexibility. Sometimes, you need to blend a bit of cunning with honesty—just enough to navigate without causing harm.

My roommate in the hostel was Subhash, hailing from Gulbarga in North Karnataka, and he was absolutely obsessed with 'Karate.' It was all he talked about, day in and day out. He even dragged me to a few Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan films—names like 'Armor of the God,' 'Enter the Dragon' and 'Break Dance' still ring a bell. We were on the second floor of the hostel, and Subhash would often practice his karate moves on the roof, probably imagining himself as the next Bruce Lee.

Now, our room window faced the Somerset apartments, and Subhash, in his karate-fueled craziness, decided to reflect light from a mirror onto the balcony where some girls were hanging out. Apparently, he did this one too many times, because the next thing I knew, their furious parents had hired some local thugs to teach us a lesson.

Completely clueless about Subhash's antics, I was blindsided when one fine day, a group of tough guys barged into our room and smashed everything in sight. By the time we gathered our team, our

belongings were wrecked. Fortunately, Subhash wasn't around for the beating. We somehow managed to shoo them away, and after that, Subhash was promptly moved to another room.

As for me? Well, let's just say I seemed to have a knack for being close to drama, yet always managing to avoid getting directly caught in the storm. Scandals seemed to swirl around me, but they never quite stuck!

The Statistics

I was eagerly waiting for a 'selection letter' from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, hoping it would arrive any day now. Meanwhile, I'd been at the GAS College for nearly five months, and despite my anticipation, I wasn't quite ready to let go of the strange yet oddly comforting chaos of campus life.

The real torture during my time there was Mr. Pakal, our statistics teacher. To this day, I don't remember his full name, but the trauma of his classes is permanently etched into my mind. He was, without a doubt, the most horrible, horrifying, terrible, and irritating teacher I'd ever encountered. The man had a knack for demoralizing students like it was his personal mission. He would say, with a grim satisfaction, "You'll never pass my course and you'll never succeed in life." He didn't reserve this gloomy prophecy just for me, either—he told it to half the class! Instead of inspiring us to do better, he seemed to relish in planting doubt and fear.

On the flip side, the college also had some truly amazing teachers. One standout was Dr K.S. Nisar Ahmed, the famous Kannada poet who wrote classics like "*Nithyotsava*." He was tough, yes, but at least he was fair and reasonable. He taught geography, and even though he had a strict demeanor, you could manage his classes without feeling like your soul was being crushed. Although I wasn't part of his class, I grew closer to him later in life. Then there was Mr. Mahadevappa, the barefoot mathematician. A humble, godly man, he would stroll into class without shoes and teach math with a calmness that was a balm for our stressed minds. His famous line, which he'd repeat to comfort struggling students, was: "*Even without mathematics, you can live... don't worry.*" Now that was the kind of

teacher who made you believe you had a future, even if you couldn't solve an equation!

Then, one fine day, a telegram arrived informing me that I needed to attend a practical class for my 'Agriculture Seat.' I thought this was it—the golden moment! I celebrated, convinced that I'd secured my seat at the University of Agricultural Sciences.

Feeling bold, and with one foot already out of the door, my friends encouraged me to finally do what no one else had dared—tell Mr. Pakal that his teaching methods were a disaster. Since I was ready to leave the college, I figured why not go out with a bang? So, in what I knew would be my last statistics class, I raised my hand and said, "*Sir, can you change your method of teaching so that everyone can understand?*"

Without missing a beat, Pakal shot back, "*I am doing Bharatanatyam; how can you expect me to do breakdance?*"

The whole class erupted in laughter, but I wasn't done. I smiled and replied, "*Sir, even in Bharatanatyam, you can change the steps.*"

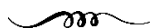
The laughter doubled. Everyone was in stitches.

Pakal, trying to save face, retorted, "*Better to change the college.*"

And just like that, I knew I'd be leaving on a high note. If nothing else, I left behind a classroom full of students who knew that even in the dreariest of situations, sometimes a bit of wit could change everything.

Life at GAS College wasn't luxurious by any means, but it taught me this valuable lesson: not every challenge can be faced head-on; some require a bit of maneuvering. And so, I made it a point to turn obstacles to my advantage, even if it sometimes required telling harmless lies or blunt truths. That's the reality of life—it's not about being flawless, it's about being resourceful and knowing when to bend without breaking.

*“Even with the God, Do not beg; Command the worth you deserve—Dr S
Bisilaiah*



Waves 08

Enter the UAS

The sun had just begun to rise on the day of the practical exam for the agriculture quota. I was already set on my future, confident that I would join the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Bangalore. After all, my elder brother was already a legend at the Hebbal Veterinary College campus, and I was ready to follow in his footsteps. How hard could it be, right?

We entered the exam hall, where rows of specimens awaited us. To my relief, they weren't anything too complex—just photos of plants, fruits, and a few live samples. “Piece of cake,” I thought. I breezed through the exam, or so I believed.

But then came the viva-voce, the dreaded oral exam, and heading the panel was none other than Dr. A. V. Rai—an absolute legend in his own right. This guy didn't just command the room; he practically owned it. He smoked right there in the meeting hall like it was his personal lounge. Forget about no-smoking rules; this was his kingdom, and he was the king.

With a confident swagger, I entered the room, fully prepared to dazzle them with my agricultural knowledge. My confidence, however, quickly wilted like an overwatered plant when Dr. Rai gave

me a piercing look, took a long drag of his cigarette, and asked in his booming voice, “Where are you from, maga⁵?”

I puffed up my chest and replied, “Sir, I’m from Dalavayi Kodihalli”—trying to make the village sound more impressive than it actually was. The DA of my name comes from this village name.

Dr. Rai raised an eyebrow. “Oh, Dalavayi Kodihalli, eh? What do you grow on your farm?”

Now, I had been ready for this. “Sir, we grow paddy, Sesame, chilly, and ragi (finger millet),” I rattled off like a pro. My mind was racing to come up with a few more crops just to show off, but before I could impress them further, Dr. Rai hit me with a curveball.

“And how long does it take to grow Sesame, maga? Gotta?”

Now, this was where the wheels started coming off. Our family didn’t actually farm ourselves; we’d outsourced that to my uncles. They were practically invisible, showing up only once every six months for a quick visit and a cup of tea. Based on pure guesswork and some illogical confidence, I blurted out, “Six months, Sir!”

Dr. Rai leaned back in his chair and gave me a smile that could only be described as both amused and mildly murderous. “Six months, huh? Well, maga, I think you’d better join fisheries.”

Fisheries?! My dreams of UAS and agriculture began to crumble like a dry leaf in the wind. In a desperate attempt to salvage my pride, I blurted out, “Sir, I’ll join veterinary!”

That did it. The entire panel erupted into laughter, as if I’d just delivered the punchline of the world’s funniest joke. They laughed so hard; I half expected them to fall out of their chairs. You see, to get into veterinary, you needed a score higher than even medical school. And here I was, Mr. Six-Month Sesame, thinking I could waltz right in.

⁵ Maga, by the way, is a term of endearment in Kannada, sort of like “son” and “Gotta” means ‘Do you know’

As Dr. Rai lit another cigarette, smoke curling ominously around his head, he said with mock seriousness, “Maga, I’ll throw you into the river first.”

He wasn’t done with me yet. “Let’s see how you handle this. Tie breaker time!” The air in the room felt thick, like the final moments of a high-stakes game show. I had no idea what was coming next, but I braced myself.

They showed me a picture. A simple picture. “Identify this,” they said.

I squinted at the image, thinking hard. My mind blanked. And then, as if by divine inspiration, I declared, “Ploughing machine!”

The room fell into an awkward silence. I thought I had nailed it, but they exchanged glances that said otherwise. After what felt like an eternity, they made their decision: *Fisheries College, Mangalore*.

As I turned to leave, Dr. Rai called out, his cigarette smoke creating a haze. “Maga, that was the last seat for fisheries. You can go now.”

I left the room in a daze, my destiny rewritten by sesame and ploughing machines. Waiting outside were my brother Anandamurthy and his gang—Bharath Shetty, Vadda Naga, Shanthakumar, Chikkalingaiah, and Pai—all eager to hear how it went. I told them the whole story, and without missing a beat, they burst out laughing. I’m talking *rolling-on-the-floor* level laughter. I couldn’t help but join in. It seemed the universe had played a cosmic joke on me, and I was the punchline. And so, on November 16th, 1988, I packed my bags and left for Mangalore, I was headed toward “The Arabian Sea” to study fisheries—a far cry from the farms of *Dalavayi Kodihalli* or Mandya.

Funny how life takes you places you never expected, sometimes with a good laugh along the way! But the fisheries course was also under UAS, Bangalore university.

The Arabian Sea

Now, this is where the real drama kicks off.

It was November 17, 1988. I arrived in Mangalore as the *last man standing* for the Fisheries course that year. My batchmates had already started on the 14th November, so I was playing catch-up from day one. As soon as I set foot on the campus, I was impressed. The place was something out of a brochure—a lush green paradise with an architectural style clearly inspired by Auburn University, USA. It was *beautiful*. A unique landscape, perfectly manicured lawns, and the hostel building looked like it could host a fancy international conference, not a bunch of sleep-deprived students. I thought to myself, “Wow, this is the start of something great! I’m going to thrive here!”

But that sweet, naive optimism lasted *exactly one night*.

By nightfall, reality slapped me across the face. I had just landed in what could only be described as *hell on earth*: **ragging season**. The senior students were like medieval knights on a power trip, and we—the freshers—were the peasants, the cannon fodder for their ridiculous whims.

The rules for us newbies were simple: short haircuts (whether you wanted one or not), no mustaches, no tucking in your shirt, and absolutely no shoes. Looking like a respectable human being was simply not allowed. And if any senior so much as *winked* at you, you had to go running to him, ready to fulfill every absurd demand.

And oh boy, these seniors had *demands*.

One of them—let’s call him the “Ringleader”—was like the *Final Boss* of ragging. He could single-handedly control the entire batch of freshers. If you survived his “counseling sessions” (yes, that’s what they called the torture), you could survive anything. His sessions could go on until 4:00 a.m.—no big deal, just another *normal* day in the hostel.

First, they’d give us their notes or records to copy. That was child’s play. Then, they’d hit us with *creative punishments*. Imagine this: we had to sleep under the cot—like dogs—and if that wasn’t

enough, we'd have to "swim" on the floor with a glass of water. Yeah, *swim* on the floor.

But that's not even the worst part. If someone cracked under pressure and started crying, the seniors had a special treat for them. They'd let you "call your parents"—but there was a catch. Instead of using an actual phone, you had to use a pair of chappals (flip-flops). Yup, you'd hold the chappals up to your ear, *pretending* to talk to your parents, and tell them, "Don't worry, mom and dad, our seniors are taking really good care of us!"

The seniors would be standing nearby, trying not to burst out laughing while you delivered your little speech. Oh, and heaven help you if the power went out during one of these late-night torture sessions. You'd be tasked with the impossible: take a hockey stick, stand under the ceiling fan, and *manually rotate it* as if you were the backup generator.

And let's not forget about the gourmet punishments. Eating soap? No problem. Swallowing toothpaste? Easy. Chewing on random leaves from the bushes? That was practically a snack.

Honestly, if I ever made it out alive, I figured I could survive anything—maybe even a zombie apocalypse.

Every day was a new episode of "What Insanity Will Happen Next?" and as horrifying as it was, it had its moments of dark comedy. I mean, you've gotta laugh at the absurdity of being told to enact a phone call with chappals, right?

By the end of that first week, I had learned one thing: this was not just college; this was bootcamp. I was going to have to toughen up and embrace the chaos if I wanted to survive Mangalore.

But deep down, I still held on to that dream I had on the first day—the hope that maybe, just maybe, once the ragging ended, I'd get back to the beautiful, peaceful campus life I'd originally envisioned. Yeah, right. But one could always dream...

Mimicry—My Saviour

The ragging saga continued, but I had a secret weapon: my talents. You see, I was not just any fresher; I was a *performer*. I could sing, and my mimicry of actors was spot-on. So, when the seniors had their nightly “talent tests,” I figured I could turn the tables and entertain them instead of being tortured.

“I can sing,” I said, confidently, as they circled around me like vultures waiting for a show. I also mentioned my mimicry skills, which piqued their interest. They thought they were in for a few laughs at my expense. What they didn’t know was that I was about to turn this into my *escape route*—at least for a while.

I launched into a flawless rendition of a popular song, and by the time I started mimicking a few famous actors, the seniors were in stitches. They loved it! *For once*, I wasn’t being grilled like a kebab. They were actually entertained, and I became the star of the night.

For a few nights, I kept this charade going. I was their personal comedian, singer, and actor, all wrapped up in one. It worked like a charm... but there’s only so much singing and mimicry one man can do before it gets exhausting. *How long could I keep this up?*

That’s when they upped the ante.

Once they figured out, I had another skill—my impeccable handwriting—they handed me their notes. “Here, copy these for us,” they said, dropping entire notebooks on my desk like a stack of legal documents for a court case. *Oh joy*. But since I had charmed them with my performances, I figured it would be wise to keep them happy for a few more days. So, I copied notes with the neatest handwriting imaginable, thinking I was buying myself some more peace.

But soon enough, I became their *entertainment on wheels*. They didn’t just call me to one block—they started dragging me *from block to block*. I was their star performer, moving like a traveling circus act. “Hey, get that guy who can sing and do mimicry!” they’d shout. And off I went, entertaining seniors across the entire hostel.

After a few nights of this, I was absolutely drained. I wasn't just entertaining them anymore; I was practically running a late-night variety show, complete with encores.

One fateful day, during a Biochemistry class with Dr. Srikar—who, by the way, had the piercing gaze of an eagle—I could barely keep my eyes open. I had been up performing for the seniors until the crack of dawn. I tried my best to stay alert, but the combination of Biochemistry equations and my exhaustion was too much to handle. And then, it happened.

Thud!

I collapsed in the middle of class, hitting the floor with a dramatic flair that even my mimicry skills couldn't fake. Dr. Srikar didn't even blink. "Get out," he said, pointing at the door with the calm, cold authority of someone who had seen *everything* in his teaching career.

So, out I went—banished, not by the seniors, but by the professor.

Now, let me tell you about the *other* formats of ragging—because apparently, creativity had no bounds at this college.

Every morning, after a meager breakfast, we freshers had to line up in order of height, from tallest to shortest, like a group of school kids on a field trip. But here's the kicker: we had to wear name plates with our Pre-University percentage written boldly on them. It was like walking around with your academic history pinned to your chest. No secrets here!

To add insult to injury, we had to march to college in a straight line, like soldiers going to battle—but without any of the glory. And the cherry on top? As we walked, we had to stop at one of the campus circles and wait for the girls from their hostel to join us. *Yep, the girls.*

There were exactly two girls in my batch: Ms. Shamila Monteiro and Ms. Seema Bala. When they joined the parade, we all had to keep marching in line, right up to the classroom. The seniors made sure we looked like a perfectly disciplined troupe of well-behaved freshers. The funny thing? Even the *teachers* watched us march by, like we were part of some bizarre morning ritual, but not a single one

bothered to intervene. It was like they had seen this parade a thousand times before and figured, *why mess with tradition?*

And so, day after day, I marched in line with my percentage hanging around my neck, no mustache, no shoes, no dignity left—but hey, I still had my singing and mimicry to keep me going.

In fact, it was equal parts hilarious and horrifying. But somehow, I survived those early days of ragging, ready to tackle whatever ridiculous challenges college life would throw at me next.

My brother had advised me to inform him if anything went wrong on campus, so he could use his influence to address the situation. After all, I was constantly reminded that I got in with “The Last Seat,” so I couldn’t afford to mess up. Naturally, I wasn’t about to take any unnecessary risks.

Then, one fine day, a peculiar character named Rajesh approached me with a truly absurd demand: **shave off my eyebrows.** Yes, *my eyebrows.* He wasn’t joking, either. I resisted, of course. I mean, who in their right mind would voluntarily walk around without eyebrows? Rajesh, clearly not one to back down, started rambling a bunch of nonsense before giving me a deadline to complete the “eyebrow mission.” Then he sauntered off, feeling quite pleased with himself.

At that point, I knew I needed backup. Enter Gajendra, a tough guy from my senior batch, and more importantly, someone from my native place. I went straight to him, laid out the situation, and he was *furious*. Gajendra didn’t take kindly to his classmate Rajesh harassing his juniors, especially one from his own neck of the woods. He marched right up to Rajesh and—wham—delivered a *ditchy*, a solid forehead shot, right to Rajesh’s face. Blood was everywhere. It escalated into a full-on senior-level drama, but I? Well, I managed to slip away unscathed, my eyebrows still intact.

Then there was **Alphonse Rodrigues**, just a year ahead of me. A “cool guy” in the sense that he wasn’t overly cruel, but still a senior who liked to throw his weight around. He caught me on my way to my room one day and asked me to tell him a joke—an *ugly* one, to be

specific. I rattled off whatever joke came to mind at the time, but he didn't laugh.

Instead, he said, "*Laugh!*"

So, I gave a chuckle.

"Louder," he commanded.

I laughed louder.

"Still louder," he said, clearly wanting some kind of performance. So, I did what he asked, feeling ridiculous the whole time.

Then he hit me with the big question: "Why are you laughing?"

Without missing a beat, I replied, "Because you didn't understand the joke."

Big mistake.

Before I knew it, he'd smacked me right in the face, leaving me with a bruised ego and a throbbing headache. Humiliated, I slumped away, but my day was about to get worse.

Enter **Rama Naik**, yet another useless, nonsense-spouting senior. He caught me in the hallway when I was at my lowest and started asking the usual barrage of absurd questions. Then, for his own twisted amusement, he gave me a series of bizarre tasks, including one that I'll never forget: "Go squeeze the balls of that stray dog... or of Shivanna, aka Gypsum." Yes, these were the delightful challenges they dreamed up for us poor first-years.

I told him I had a headache, hoping for some sympathy. Instead, he plucked a few leaves from a guava tree, handed them to me, and commanded, "Eat these." So, I did. After all, in those early days, you didn't argue with seniors.

And that's how we spent our first trimester—dodging absurd demands, enduring humiliation, and constantly navigating the strange power dynamics of campus life. Welcome to the jungle!

Mission Room No. 21

I was staying in Narmada Block, one of the many hostel blocks named after famous rivers like Cauvery, Ganga, and Netravathi. Eventually, they even built ‘Sharavati’ for the postgraduates, but I was in Narmada with my roommates, Vinayumar and Sureshkumar, both from Bangalore. We were like a small tribe, plotting ways to survive the madness of ragging.

One afternoon, after lunch, a brilliant (or so I thought) idea popped into my head. I gathered a few of my classmates and made a bold declaration. I said, “Listen, from now on, we all stay in *this* room together. If any senior dares to come and call us for their crazy ragging stuff, we’ll drag him inside and beat him up!” I expected thunderous applause. Instead, there was a collective nod—more out of fear than enthusiasm—but they agreed to the plan. We were going to form a ragging resistance.

Now, you should know, during this ragging period, some of the students had developed strange bonds with the seniors—maybe because they were from the same region or shared the same caste, or possibly they just hoped for protection. Whatever the reason, loyalties were divided. And as luck would have it, someone leaked our master strategy. Yep, word got out that we were planning to revolt against the senior tyranny.

By evening, things took a wild turn. A mob of seniors, angrier than a pack of rabid dogs, ganged up and dragged me to some other room, away from my little group of rebel classmates. There was chaos and confusion all around, with seniors shouting at each other, and I couldn’t quite figure out whether they wanted to punish me or just argue among themselves. In the midst of this madness, one of the few level-headed seniors, Manoj Mathew, stepped in. He wasn’t like the others—he actually had a brain. He locked me up in Room 34, right there in Narmada Block.

And so, the real drama began. I was stuck in this room while they debated my fate. There was a lot of pushing, shoving, and shouting outside. Half of them wanted to make an example out of me, while the other half thought they were wasting too much time arguing.

Eventually, they came to an agreement: they were going to intensify the ragging on me, just to teach me a lesson for having the audacity to suggest resisting them.

What they didn't realize, though, was that while they were busy plotting my doom, I had my own plan forming. You see, Manoj Mathew had unknowingly given me a little advantage by locking me in Room 34. It wasn't just any room—it was the scary room of the block, known only to a few. Someone committed suicide long ago in that room. Hidden below the cot for an hour. During their fight, I was left free by the Manoj himself. So, while they were busy scheming, I climbed out through the window, made my way down to the campus grounds, and casually blended into the group of students hanging around, as if nothing had happened. By the time the seniors realized I had disappeared from Room 34, I was already outside, laughing it off with my classmates, who couldn't believe I'd managed them all.

The word spread quickly about my great escape, and while the seniors were determined to make my life a living hell, I had gained a bit of notoriety among my batchmates. From that day on, the ragging continued, but there was an unspoken respect—like I'd earned my place in the madness.

Of course, they never quite stopped messing with me, but after that, I always had an escape plan up my sleeve.

Mr Ranga

One evening, just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, Rangaswamy—the senior tough guy, known for being a total nonsense-spewing brute—decided it was time to take his revenge on me. I had somehow managed to dodge his wrath for a while, but that day, my luck had run out. He stormed into my room with a menacing look on his face, clearly out for blood. I braced myself.

Without any pleasantries, he barked, “Wear your best shirt!” Now, I didn't exactly have a wardrobe full of fancy clothes. I had just two decent ‘Crante’ brand shirts—both of which were hard-earned purchases, bought with the sweat and sacrifice of my parents. Still, I

knew better than to argue, so I put on one of the shirts, hoping to get through this without too much trouble.

But Rangaswamy had other plans. He grabbed a glass of water, poured it over my new shirt, soaking it completely. "Crawl!" he ordered. "Swim on the floor!"

I was horrified. I tried to reason with him, but reasoning with Rangaswamy was like trying to explain algebra to a rock. He was determined to humiliate me. So there I was, on the floor, crawling and pretending to swim in my soaked shirt, the last bit of dignity I had slipping away.

The worst part? It wasn't the ragging that made me cry that night. No, it was the fact that my hard-earned shirt, bought with my parents' money, was ruined. My family had sacrificed so much to get me through school, and here I was, watching it all go to waste because of some senior's sadistic game. That hit me harder than any humiliation ever could. I spent the entire night sobbing, not out of fear, but out of sheer frustration and guilt.

As I lay there in the dark, emotions swirling, thoughts of revenge crept into my mind. I wanted to kill Rangaswamy. In that moment of pure anger, I fantasized about it. My fists clenched, my mind racing with dark thoughts. I didn't care how big or tough he was; I wanted to make him pay for what he had done—not just to me, but to my parents' sacrifice.

But just as quickly as those thoughts came, something else stopped me dead in my tracks: "The Last Seat". That constant, nagging reminder that I was the last person admitted into this course, and that I had no room for error. If I messed this up, if I retaliated, everything could spiral out of control. I had worked too hard to be here, and my family had worked even harder. One wrong move and I could lose it all. Every time I thought about lashing out, that looming fear of losing "The Last Seat" would pull me back from the edge.

So, instead of acting on my anger, I cried. I cried because of the helplessness, because I couldn't do anything about the unfairness of

it all. And I cried because deep down, I knew that I couldn't let one miserable guy like Rangaswamy ruin everything I had worked for.

The night passed slowly, my mind battling between revenge and restraint. In the end, it was the fear of losing everything that won out. I knew I had to survive this, keep my head down, and just get through it. But I'd never forget the feeling of helplessness that night, and the anger that still simmered deep inside me, but not waiting for any revenge.

Month End Feast

At the end of every month, we were treated to a grand feast—a meal fit for kings (or at least starving college students). On 30th November 1988, I'd just polished off my dinner and was casually strolling out of the mess when I was spotted by none other than L. N. Pai—a man with the body language of someone trying to moonwalk through life but without any of Michael Jackson's grace. This guy was already tipsy, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

Before I knew it, he grabbed me and dragged me to Cauvery Block, Room No. 09, which, at that point, was a notorious hub for "liquid fun." Inside, I found Ganapathi Shetty and Subramanya, already deep in their cups, laughing like they'd just heard the world's funniest joke. As soon as I stepped in, someone—don't even remember who—ordered me to climb on top of a cupboard. And like the obedient junior I was, I squeezed into the narrow gap between the ceiling and the cupboard, trying not to fall to my death.

Then came the real kicker. "Sing the National Anthem!" someone barked from below. Manzoor, a quiet, sober guy (at least in comparison to the drunken trio), chimed in, "How can you sit and sing the National Anthem, man?" Well, that was a good point, so I awkwardly rose as much as I could in that cramped space, bent in half like a poorly-folded pretzel, one hand saluting, and began to sing. Ganapathi Shetty, slurring and swaying, asked, "Why are you singing at night?"

Without missing a beat, I blurted out, "We got freedom at night, so why not sing at night?" That earned me a chappal to the head. Yep, Shetty hurled his slipper at me like he was competing in some

kind of shoe-throwing Olympics. It hit me square in the chest, but before the situation could escalate, in strolled Somashekar Havaladar, the coolest, calmest guy in the room. He swooped in like a superhero, diffused the tension, and helped me climb down from my awkward perch.

But the night wasn't over. Pai, in his drunken glory, apparently impressed by my "patriotism" and the fact that I survived a flying chappal attack, decided to reward me. His idea of a reward? Alcohol. Lots of it. He offered me a drink in the most bizarre way possible—by pouring 'rum' directly into my cupped hands. I'd never tasted alcohol before, but there was no escape. Pai poured, and I drank, straight from my hands like some kind of tribal ritual. The rum burned like a fireball going down my throat, and I was on the verge of tears when, out of nowhere, Pai offered me a sweet peda to "balance" the taste.

But no respite lasted long with Pai. He continued to pour rum, drop by drop, into my hands, forcing me to drink until I lost track of how much I had consumed. Three shots, four? Who knew? I don't even remember how the night ended. All I knew was, by the end of it, I was numb—both emotionally and physically—and somehow still standing (though that might be thanks to the wall I was leaning against for dear life).

The next morning? Well, let's just say I had no idea how I got back to my room. The events of the previous night were a blur, but one thing was clear: L. N. Pai was now a permanent character in my ragging nightmares. And that night would go down in history as the night I sang the National Anthem while half-bent on a cupboard, got hit, and tasted the world's worst combination of rum and peda.

Teaching Maths

One evening, Gopikrishna, one of the more creative tormentors, came up to me and asked casually, "So, which game do you play?" Trying to sound sporty and confident, I replied, "Volleyball." His eyes lit up, but I should've seen the trap coming. He handed me a tiny matchstick—yes, a matchstick—and said, "Go measure the volleyball court with this."

Being the obedient junior that I was, I went out to the field, matchstick in hand, and proceeded to measure the court. I mean, how else was I supposed to do it? So, I spent what felt like an eternity in the field, measuring imaginary lengths, coming up with random numbers. After a solid effort (or so I thought), I returned and proudly reported something along the lines of "Oh, it's 3,000 matchsticks long!"

The seniors, sly as they were, simply nodded and pretended to be impressed. But they were smarter than I gave them credit for. They quickly grabbed Suresh, my roommate, and sent him off to measure it too, because apparently, they believed in a second opinion. Poor Suresh, being way more sincere than I ever was, actually went out there and measured it stick by stick, probably counting it all accurately. Naturally, this earned me an even more intense round of ragging later on for my half-hearted attempt.

But that wasn't the only measuring game they played. Oh no, far from it. On any given day, they'd come up with random tasks. "Count the number of trees in the campus," one would say, handing me a twig as though I was about to start a botanical survey. "How many stairs are there in the hostel?" another would demand, as if they were planning to install an elevator. I swear, they must have had a secret betting pool on how many ridiculous requests they could come up with.

Then came one evening when our warden, Dr. T. M. R. Shetty, decided to intervene. He must've heard the whispers of ragging or seen too many tired, miserable faces around campus. Parking his scooter in front of the mess like a sheriff in an old Western, he called all the first-year students to gather around. We lined up, sniffing and teary-eyed, like we were about to confess all our sins.

Not only that, but Dr. Shetty also summoned the notorious ringleaders from the senior batch—guys like Gopikrishna and his merry band of ragging experts. They stood there, arms folded, trying to look as innocent as possible. Dr. Shetty, with his stern voice, asked us point-blank, "Tell me, which senior has been ragging you?"

Now, here was the moment of truth. But instead of speaking out, we just stood there, awkwardly shifting our feet. He asked again, "Come on, name anyone." Still, we said nothing. The ragging had worked its magic—we had developed a strange camaraderie with the very people who tormented us. So instead, we chose to protect them.

Dr. Shetty's patience was wearing thin. "Then why are you all crying?" he asked. That's when someone, in a moment of pure desperation, blurted out, "We miss our parents, sir! We remember them when we see you!" It was the most ridiculous excuse ever, and we all knew it, including Dr. Shetty.

He stared at us, probably thinking how bad we were at lying, but what could he do? He had no names, no evidence. So, with a disappointed sigh, he left, leaving us to our fate. And once again, my mind drifted back to my **"Last Seat"**—the one thing that kept me from losing my cool or causing any trouble.

It was all about survival—whether it was measuring volleyball courts with matchsticks, counting trees like an amateur botanist, or making up emotional excuses on the fly. We endured it all, clinging to our strange solidarity and somehow, always managing to laugh about it later.

College life has its fair share of ups and downs, but nothing quite prepares you for the rollercoaster that is ragging. Sure, there were individual humiliations and "tasks" assigned to us by seniors, but it was the *group ragging* that truly tested your endurance and your spirit. Those moments were like twisted reality shows—except no cameras, no rewards, just the sheer will to survive another day.

Some evenings, the seniors used to gather all the juniors in the mess hall corridor. The dress code? Shorts. Only shorts. We stood there, shivering—not from cold, but from a mixture of nervousness and embarrassment. And then came the music. The iconic beats of Tarzan blared through the speakers, followed by the chartbuster from the movie *Tezaab*, "Ek Do Teen," featuring the legendary Madhuri Dixit. The song had set the country ablaze with her dance moves, and now, it was about to set us on fire—*metaphorically* speaking.

The seniors lined up in their chairs, ready for their evening entertainment. Mahesh Prabhu and Gopikrishna—the ultimate cynics—were the ringleaders. With their smug smiles and mocking tone, they would assign us ridiculous dance moves and slangs to scream at the top of our lungs. "Dance like Madhuri!" they'd order, pointing at some poor junior who clearly had never danced a day in his life. The rest of us? We weren't any luckier. We were all expected to dance—no exceptions. Hours would pass by, and we were still in our embarrassing shorts, moving like awkward robots.

And the songs kept coming, one after another. Tarzan was on loop, and when the iconic beats of '*Ek Do Teen...*' would hit, they'd crank up the volume to a level that rattled the windows. "Keep dancing!" they'd yell. "Why are you stopping? Madhuri didn't stop in the movie, so neither should you!"

It was an absurd scene. Imagine a bunch of clueless, nervous freshmen dancing like their lives depended on it, while seniors watched, sipping tea and laughing at our misery. If someone tried to slack off, Mahesh and Gopikrishna would immediately zero in on them. "What's wrong, champ? Not feeling the beat? How about some motivation?" Then, they'd give out slangs, the kind you wouldn't even say out loud if your parents were in another country, let alone nearby. But we had no choice. We had to yell these slangs as loud as possible. Pure entertainment—at least, for them.

Looking back, the sheer absurdity of it was almost comical, but in that moment, it felt like torture. In the era before mobile phones, there was no way to zone out, no social media to scroll through to mentally escape. No distractions. The only entertainment these seniors had was us—their human jukeboxes and dance monkeys. And boy, did they use us well. It didn't matter if you were a good dancer, or if you had two left feet. In that mess hall, you *became* Madhuri Dixit, for hours on end. This is how Madhuri becomes part of lives.

The juniors? We were a mix of emotions. Some found humour in the ridiculousness of it all, others gritted their teeth and waited for it to end. And of course, some were absolutely terrified, not knowing

when the next “punishment” would come if they didn’t dance enthusiastically enough.

Mahesh Prabhu and Gopikrishna, with their sharp wit and endless sarcasm, would poke fun at anyone who seemed like they were about to break down. But every now and then, even they would tire of it. As the night wore on, they would become less harsh, perhaps even realizing how ridiculous this whole charade was. But not before ensuring we had all danced our hearts out—awkward limbs flailing, sweat dripping, and voices hoarse from screaming those slangs.

Mr Vinod and Mr Ramachary

During our time in college, there were still some notorious gangs among the senior-most students. In particular, Vinod Eashwar, Vinayak Manu, Deepak Sharma, and others from the Cauvery block had quite a reputation. They had a peculiar ritual—playing cards while completely naked. One day, Mr. Suresh (who later left fisheries to pursue dairy science) and I were caught in their midst. To add to the absurdity, Vinod, standing naked between us, commanded that we worship what we saw in front of us. In compliance, we performed a mock prayer, lighting agarbatti (Incense sticks) and offering praises in our language, all while they orchestrated the scene. These seniors were physically imposing—tall and well-built, unlike many of today’s students in the same age group.

Another figure who left a lasting impression was Ramachary, who would go on to become the Director of Fisheries for the state. He was infamous for his use of strong language and for orchestrating mass ragging sessions. Juniors with a mischievous streak were often taken to face both Ganapathi Shetty and Ramachary. However, amidst all the chaos, there was one good thing that came out of it. Ramachary ordered me and Dinesh Kumar (who is now the Director of Fisheries for the Government of Karnataka) to accompany him for volleyball sessions. For the first few days, we served as ‘ball boys,’ but the following year, both of us made it onto the college team. Dinesh went on to achieve university honours, and became ‘University Blue.’

When the night finally ended, and the speakers were silenced, we would all limp back to our rooms, drained but somehow a little closer as a batch. It was the bizarre, shared experience of surviving these ragging rituals that bonded us. Even though we felt humiliated in the moment, in some twisted way, it was also kind of a badge of honour. You knew, if you could survive those hours of "Madhuri Dixit" dance sessions, you could survive anything in college.

And that's how we entertained ourselves in the days before mobile phones. No apps, no reels, just pure, raw ragging in all its strange glory.

The great escape from the Arabian Sea

In an attempt to escape the relentless ragging, Anjan, a few friends, and I decided to seek refuge at Someshwar Beach, one of the rocky shores near Mangalore. The beach, with its vast stretch of rocky formations exposed during low tide, seemed like a perfect spot for us to unwind and forget the stress of hostel life for a while. We climbed onto a large rock and began playing casually, feeling a sense of freedom with the sea breeze and the rhythmic waves lapping at the rocks. As the sun began to set, the atmosphere became almost magical, with the golden light reflecting off the water. It felt as though we had escaped not just the ragging, but the entire world.

But as the sun dipped lower, something changed. The waves that had been gentle and soothing began to rise, slowly at first, and then with more intensity. We didn't think much of it initially—just nature doing its thing. But within minutes, the waves had grown fierce, crashing against the rocks with a power we hadn't anticipated. Before we knew it, we were trapped. The rising tide was swallowing the rocks beneath us, and every time a wave crashed, it threatened to pull us into the deeper ocean. Fear gripped us as we realized the severity of the situation. The calm we had felt moments ago was replaced by panic. The vastness of the ocean suddenly felt terrifying, as if it could swallow us whole at any moment.

We started shouting, desperate for help. Our voices echoed across the beach, and soon enough, some onlookers and our friends who had been nearby gathered on the shore. They quickly realized

our predicament and began frantically throwing towels, clothes—anything they could find—towards us. Every second felt like an eternity. The waves were relentless, and the jagged rocks we clung to were covered with sharp patella and barnacles, intertidal marine organisms with hard shells that cut into our skin with every movement.

Despite the fear and pain, the desperation to survive kept us going. Somehow, we managed to catch hold of the towels and clothes thrown to us, using them as lifelines to pull ourselves out of the rising tide. I remember the sting of the saltwater and the sharp rocks cutting into my skin as we tried to jump from one rock to another. My hands were bloodied, my legs scraped, but none of that mattered. All that mattered was escaping the merciless waves that were crashing harder and harder around us. In those moments, it felt like the sea was testing us—testing our strength, our will, and our courage.

Finally, with the help of our friends and the onlookers, we were dragged out of the water. The cuts on our skin stung as we collapsed on the beach, exhausted but grateful. The sea had spared us that day, and it was as though we had been given a second chance. It was a terrifying experience, but as I lay there on the sand, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of connection with the ocean. The sea had both threatened my life and spared it, teaching me the delicate balance between danger and mercy.

It was then that I realized just how profound my bond with the sea had become. Maybe that's why, 36 years later, when I sat down to write this book, I named it "*Arabian Sea*." The sea had given me life that day, and in many ways, it continued to shape the course of my life. It was no coincidence that I eventually started the *Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Coordination Committee (Sea=MC²)*, an initiative that aimed to protect and preserve the very waters that had once threatened to take me. The sea had taught me humility, respect, and an unshakable love for its mysterious depths.

How do you repay a debt like that? How do you express gratitude to something as vast and powerful as the sea? The truth is, you can't.

The ocean doesn't ask for anything in return. It gives and takes on its own terms. But through my work, through this book, and through my dedication to marine conservation, I hope in some small way to honour the sea's mercy. It's a connection that runs deeper than words—a bond that will stay with me for the rest of my life. The sea and I are forever intertwined, and I will always carry a part of her with me, in every decision I make, in every wave I hear crashing against the shore.

The End of Ragging

This ragging used to go up till new year. Once the new year party is over, we all become friends and no more tortures; but new formats of soft ragging starts. That is record writing, writing notes for them and drawing pictures etc.

The food in the mess was, surprisingly, one of the few things that kept us going amidst the chaos of college life. I wasn't much of a breakfast person, though. I never really bothered with it. Instead, my share would go to Sanjunath or someone else who needed an extra helping of energy to survive the relentless ragging sessions. I figured they needed it more than I did, given that I was too busy planning my escape routes from seniors to think about eating in the morning.

But lunch—ah, that was a different story. It was the highlight of my day. Every afternoon, we were treated like royalty with a solid serving of 200-250 grams of mackerel fish, fresh and cooked to perfection. There's something about the way they prepared it—crispy on the outside, tender on the inside—that made it worth all the nonsense we had to endure. If you were a fish lover, you were in heaven.

As for dinner, it was equally satisfying. Twice a week, we'd have chicken—yes, actual chicken—not the miserable portions you'd expect in a college mess. And then, Sundays? They were practically a feast day. For lunch, they'd serve a generous quarter of a chicken per person, which was something I looked forward to all week.

After the ragging period ended, our bond grew tighter, and we all became incredibly close. Despite the fact that our batch had only 24 students, it was filled with raw talent in every direction. It was

almost as if each of us had a special role to play, making our group truly unique. Sanju was not only a talented athlete but also a skilled tabla player. Suresh J—flutist, played the flute beautifully. I had my hands in everything—singing, acting in dramas, painting, you name it. Mitra was an expert on dogs, Basya excelled in basketball, Riaz dabbled in poetry, Anand was an exceptional cheerleader, and Naveen Kumar, with his sharp wit, was not only a brilliant debater but also a talented artist and theatre director.

Vishwa, the chess prodigy, always kept us on our toes mentally, while Vinay dominated in table tennis, smashing his way to wins. Ramesh was our cricket star, and Soma and Anjan tore it up on the Kabaddi and Kho-Kho fields. Swamy, with his melodious voice, often joined me in musical performances, and Umesh's shuttle skills could give any seasoned player a run for their money. Shamila was our very own aquatic marvel, a swimmer with almost supernatural grace in the water.

During my school days, there was this one character, Channa, who left quite an impression. He was an absolute die-hard fan of the film actor Tiger Prabhakar. For every single thing he liked or appreciated, Channa had only one word: "Tiger!" Whether you aced an exam, hit a six, or just showed up with a cool new haircut, Channa would nod his head with approval and simply say, "Tiger." Inspired by his relentless admiration for Tiger Prabhakar, I decided to name our batch the "Tigers." And just like that, a trend was born. Before we knew it, every new batch started naming themselves after some fierce or daring creature. The campus was soon crawling with batches like the "Piranhas," the "Cobras," the "Eagles," the "Daredevils," the "Marine Marcells," the "Dolphins," and more. It was like our little zoo of talent, each group competing for the coolest, most fearsome name.

When you sit back and remember the olden/golden days, it was hilarious to see how quickly everyone embraced their animalistic identities. The Tigers took pride in our boldness, but the Piranhas? They were always sharp and quick with their quips. The Eagles tried to stay above it all, acting aloof with their "birds-eye view" of things, but they couldn't resist getting dragged into our playful rivalries.

The ‘Cobras’ were fangless and compatible with all the seniors. Even the Dolphins—of all the names they could have picked—brought their own grace and charm to the table. We may have all had different names, but one thing was for sure: we were one tight-knit group of students who knew how to blend talent, fun, and a bit of friendly competition into the best years of our lives.

The hostel life was more than just a place to stay—it became a transformative experience that shaped us in ways we never imagined. Living in such a vibrant, close-knit environment exposed us to a wide variety of subjects and the raw, unfiltered truths of life, things that would have taken years to learn had we been in a more sheltered or isolated environment. The constant interaction with people from different backgrounds, each with their own stories and challenges, gave us a deep understanding of human nature and society.

This immersion didn’t just educate us academically; it made us resilient and adaptable, ready to face any odd or difficult situation with courage. There’s something about hostel life that prepares you for the unexpected, from managing day-to-day problems to handling emergencies, all while juggling friendships, studies, and extracurriculars. We developed a sense of independence early on, learning how to fend for ourselves while also being part of a supportive community.

Leadership qualities were born here. In a hostel setting, you’re often pushed into situations where you need to take charge, make decisions, and sometimes even lead your peers. Over time, this helped us refine our skills in communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. We built great vocabularies, not just from our studies, but from daily conversations, debates, and discussions on a wide range of topics. Living together also polished our talents—whether it was in sports, music, drama, or anything else, we learned to express ourselves confidently.

One unique advantage of being in a small campus setting was that it allowed us to explore every possible avenue, be it sports, cultural activities, or leadership roles. In bigger institutions, you often get overshadowed by larger groups, but here, we had the

opportunity to try our hand at everything. We weren't confined to one particular role. If you wanted to try your luck in cricket one day and take part in a cultural event the next, the doors were wide open. We discovered talents we never even knew we had because there was always room for experimentation, for learning, and for failure, without the fear of judgment.

The Cricket Ball between the Legs

Ramesh M.R. was a cricket enthusiast, and while I was familiar with the game, I only played during formal matches, particularly with the leather ball. One blue moon day, I even managed to score 16 runs in 16 overs—clearly, I was in no rush to break any records! As life goes on, one Saturday afternoon, I was invited to join a match. As I arrived at the ground, everyone was busy warming up. Ramesh gathered a few of us and began throwing low catches to help us practice. During one such drill, a ball hit the upper part of my inner palm, slipped through, and struck me right in the testes. In that moment, I felt as if I had just met Yama, the god of death, but somehow, I snapped back to reality within seconds. My body was warm with shock, but I carried on with the game.

We eventually headed back to the hostel, but as time passed, something alarming began to happen—my testes started swelling. It grew bigger, and bigger—much larger than the cricket ball that had caused this mess. The pain was excruciating, but somehow, I managed to endure it. The next morning, I decided to seek medical help, so my friend Vinay and I headed to Wenlock Hospital in the city.

Once we arrived, I stood in line at the registration counter. The man behind the small window asked me, "Which department?" I turned to Vinay for help. "Which department should I go to?" I asked. He, with all the confidence in the world, instructed me to say "VD." Oblivious to what that actually meant, I followed his advice.

The moment I said "VD," the man at the counter raised an eyebrow and asked, "Where had you gone?" Confused, I responded, "I went to play cricket."

"Cricket? Cricket?!" he laughed. He then asked, "What exactly is the problem?" I explained the unfortunate incident with the ball hitting my testes.

Laughing even harder now, he replied, "Then why are you asking for VD?" Finally, he gave me a slip and directed me to Room No. 22, with a grin still on his face. As we walked away, I turned to Vinay, curious. He looked sheepish and said, "VD stands for Venereal Disease—it's for sexual health issues."

I couldn't help but burst into laughter. "*Ayyo, magane!*" I exclaimed, "What have you done!" Vinay, now embarrassed, said, "I thought since it's the same area, it might be related!"

When I was finally called into the examination room, I was barely able to walk. I had to lower my knees and spread my legs, walking in a wide, awkward gait—like some sort of wounded animal.

The doctor examined my swollen problem with a curious look on his face. I could sense that something unusual was about to unfold. Without a word, he left the room and returned a few minutes later—this time with a dozen medical students trailing behind him. To my horror, more than half of them were girls. My heart raced as they all gathered around me, eager to learn from my unfortunate condition.

The doctor, now in full "teaching mode," turned to me and said, "Remove all your lowers." I was shocked but too embarrassed to protest in front of the eager crowd of students. Reluctantly, I did as he asked, feeling utterly exposed. The doctor then took out a Reynolds pen (of all things!) and began to press and move it around on my swollen testes as if it were a whiteboard diagram.

He held the swollen scrotum with one hand and, with a straight face, commanded, "Cough loudly." My eyes widened in disbelief. "Sir, I'm dying from pain here—I can't even breathe properly, and you're asking me to cough?" I was practically pleading with him.

"No, no," the doctor insisted, "you must cough. We need to observe the movement." With each passing second, my dignity was diminishing. He turned toward the group of students, who were all taking notes diligently, and began explaining,

“The right scrotum has experienced an impact at the bottom... This can sometimes lead to serious complications...” It was all bla, bla, bla to me at that point—I was too focused on surviving this humiliation.

Finally, after what felt like hours, the doctor prescribed some tablets for 15 days and advised me to take rest. Vinay and I left the hospital, and by the time we reached the hostel, I was in no shape to sit or lie down comfortably. The pain was unbearable, but there was no escaping it.

Strangely enough, that’s when my attitude changed. I started attending classes like a model student, walking in my awkward, wide-legged "style," and enduring the situation with a bizarre sense of humour. Even in that painful state, I found a way to entertain myself and others. My friends started calling me "Crab Man" because of how I walked, and we all laughed about it.

It was as if I had become a legend in my own right—a guy who took a cricket ball to the groin, survived a public medical exam, and still managed to find humour in the most uncomfortable situation imaginable.

The hostel also fostered a strong sense of camaraderie. Through shared experiences—both good and bad—we formed deep, lasting bonds with our peers. Late-night discussions about life, career aspirations, and dreams over a cup of chai, or even a heated debate on the latest cricket match, added to the richness of our lives. It was in the hostel that we truly understood the meaning of teamwork and mutual support. Whether it was staying up late to help a friend with studies, preparing for an event, or just being there during tough times, the hostel nurtured a spirit of collaboration and empathy.

Hostel life didn’t just teach us about academics or extracurriculars—it equipped us with essential life skills. It taught us how to lead, how to communicate, how to handle failures and challenges, and most importantly, how to be self-sufficient. The lessons we learned within those walls became invaluable in shaping our personalities, and those lessons have stayed with us, helping us succeed in both our personal and professional lives.

One ‘Big Fight’

A good hostel experience isn't complete without one or two memorable fights to reflect on when you grow older. Boban Varghese was not only a formidable cricketer, having played at the zone level, but he was also a skilled football and volleyball player. He had a presence on the sports field that was hard to ignore, and he was known for his confidence, sometimes bordering on arrogance. One night around 10:30 p.m., he was out near the washroom by the mess hall, dribbling and kicking a football against the wall. It was his usual routine, unwinding after a long day, but for me, sitting on the third floor of the Narmada Block, trying to focus on my studies, the noise was unbearable.

I wasn't exactly known for being studious, and Boban knew it well. When I yelled down to him, asking him to stop because the constant thudding against the wall was distracting, he let out a loud laugh and casually replied, “*Hogale!*”—basically telling me to get lost. It wasn't unusual for Boban to joke around like this, but at that moment, something snapped. I felt disrespected, and all those pent-up frustrations from the ragging period began to bubble up.

I wasn't alone in feeling this way. My friends, Somashekar and Anjaneyappa, were in the next room, and like me, they had been harbouring thoughts of revenge for the way we'd been ragged and for a few other reasons. We had all been preparing for a confrontation like this for some time. It was almost as if we were living in anticipation of a gang war. Many of us had weapons stashed away in our rooms—hockey sticks, cricket wickets, rods—ready to be picked up at a moment's notice. I even had a nunchaku hanging from my cot, always within reach, as a subtle reminder of the tensions that could flare up at any time. Of course, I was not good at using it and never used it. It was just a “Feel Good” concept.

After Boban's dismissal of my request, I went straight to my friends to let them know what had happened. It didn't take long for the situation to escalate. Within minutes, around 19-20 of our batchmates gathered in front of the mess hall, ready for a showdown. The atmosphere was thick with tension, and you could feel that

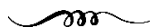
something was about to go down. Some of the seniors, loyal to Boban, quickly arrived on the scene to back him up. One of them was Yogesh Chawan—a towering six-foot-tall guy who was as intimidating as they come. Chawan was known for his size and his no-nonsense attitude.

The situation grew more intense when Chawan, towering over us, said, “Chal be,” which means “get lost” in Hindi. The problem was that many of us weren’t particularly strong in Hindi or English, and our confidence in speaking these languages was shaky at best. Anjan, in the heat of the moment, tried to respond but couldn’t quite find the right words. What came out of his mouth was a mix of sounds—“Hey Chawan...No...Shh...Trr.” It was like something straight out of a scene from *Bahubali: The Beginning*, where the tribal characters use a mix of grunts and phrases to communicate. It was a hilarious but tense moment, with words like “Shh...Hey...No...*Beda*” coming out, creating a strange, almost tribal chant.

At this point, many of our classmates were brandishing sticks and rods, ready to jump into action if things escalated. The seniors, sensing the brewing danger, began to back off, realizing that they were outnumbered and that this could get ugly fast. The situation somehow simmered down, but for those few moments, the air was thick with the possibility of a full-blown fight breaking out. It was one of those times where we were all mentally and physically prepared for anything, but fortunately, the clash was averted.

Now, the entire drama felt like it could have easily spiralled out of control. Now, years later, it’s amusing to think that Yogesh Chawan, who once stood there in front of us as an intimidating senior, is now a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Uttar Pradesh. And Boban? He’s in Australia, probably dribbling a ball against a wall somewhere, but far away from our little college battlefield. Those moments, though, gave us stories that still bring laughter and nostalgia—lessons in friendship, rivalry, and the wild unpredictability of hostel life.

“Everything is food; only the dosage matters. —Magada”



Tide 01

The Low Tide

The hostel life, with its relentless ragging, had worn me down so much that getting up in the morning and rushing to class without breakfast became my routine. I barely managed to drag myself out of bed, let alone prepare for the day ahead. I had entered college with the hope of learning about fisheries, expecting to dive into the subject right away. But instead, I found myself sitting through courses like sociology, statistics, biochemistry, economics, English, and psychology. It felt like anything but what I had signed up for.

My ability to concentrate in class quickly deteriorated. Exhausted from late-night ragging sessions, I often found myself dozing off, barely able to keep my eyes open. More than once, I was thrown out of the classroom for falling asleep. That's how I earned the title of an “Outstanding Student”—but not in the way anyone aspires to. It wasn't because of my academic performance, but because I was literally standing outside the class most of the time.

While some of the seniors indulged in immature behaviour and ragging, there was one teacher, Dr. V. G. Bhat, who took things to a whole new level. He was an English teacher, but instead of inspiring us or teaching us the language with enthusiasm, he seemed to take pleasure in mocking us, making us feel morally defeated. His idea of teaching was more about belittling us than helping us improve. Many of us struggled to keep up in his class, and as a result, I, along with the majority of my classmates, ended up failing English. To

make matters worse, we had to repeat the course with the junior batch the following year. Ironically, I should thank Dr. Bhat for this failure, because it gave me an opportunity to form closer bonds with the juniors. Through that experience, I gained friendships I would have otherwise missed out on.

Another challenge came in the form of Dr. K. S. Udupa's statistics class. I had previously attended Mr. Pakal's statistics course at GAS College in Bangalore, which had been manageable. But Dr. Udupa's teaching was on another level entirely—it was as hard as diamond. His classes were a monotonous drone, devoid of any voice modulation, enthusiasm, or emotion. It felt like he was reciting something in a flat, lifeless tone, and we often joked that it was like “pissing like a donkey”—an expression we used in slang for something painfully dull and repetitive. Instead of breaking down the subject to make it easier for us to grasp, he seemed to relish in confusing us. It was as though teaching wasn't his priority; instead, he was there to showcase the complexity of the subject without helping us understand it.

Perhaps others had a different experience, but through my lens, those classes felt like mental torture. The professors, with their monotonous lectures and lack of empathy, made learning a struggle rather than a joy. I didn't expect my college life to be a walk in the park, but between the ragging, the exhaustion, and the indifferent teaching, it felt like I was constantly fighting an uphill battle. And yet, in all of this chaos, there was a strange sense of resilience building within me. Despite failing English, despite struggling with statistics, I was learning more about life, survival, and perseverance than any classroom could ever teach me.

Oxygen

I scored 57 out of 100 in sociology. The minimum passing marks were 60, just three more than what I managed. So, technically, I had failed. It felt like a punch to the gut—failing by just three marks seemed unfair after all the effort I had put in. Though disappointed, I thought, “Why not take a chance?” After all, teachers are human too, right? Maybe if I approached my sociology professor and

explained my situation, he'd give me those three extra marks as grace.

I mustered up the courage and went to meet him after class. He was sitting at his desk, going through some papers, his glasses perched on his nose. I hesitated for a second but then blurted out, "Sir, I've scored 57. I just need three more marks to pass. Is there any chance you could... maybe... give me a grace of 3 marks?"

He looked up at me, not with the kindness I had hoped for but with a rather blank, stern expression. His eyes narrowed, and he paused for a moment, as if weighing my request. Then, without missing a beat, he said, "If you are nutrient deficient, I can supplement the nutrient. But if you are unable to breathe, I cannot supply oxygen."

I blinked, completely baffled. His words hung in the air, but I couldn't quite grasp their meaning. I stood there, nodding like I understood, though deep down, I was lost. Then, with a finality in his voice, he added, "So, no, I cannot give you those three marks."

It took me several hours to figure out what he had meant. At first, I walked out of the room feeling rejected and a bit insulted. But slowly, like a puzzle clicking into place, the metaphor unravelled. What he meant was that in subjects like sociology—where understanding is key—if I was deficient in knowledge, he could guide me, supplementing my learning like a nutrient. But if I was fundamentally unable to grasp the core concepts, he couldn't simply give me those three marks as if supplying oxygen to someone who couldn't breathe. In his eyes, I needed to be self-sufficient in understanding, not rescued by grace marks.

It wasn't just a rejection; it was a philosophy of life. Learning was meant to be earned, not gifted.

But as life would have it, destiny played its own game. Though I was knocked down by this failure, I refused to give up. The ventilator might have been shut off in that moment, but my spirit was still fighting for survival. It was a strange thing, this mixture of failure and hope—it triggered me, making me more determined to succeed.

I poured everything I had into studying for the retake of the exam burning the midnight oil.

The irony was that failing by those three marks became the turning point in my academic life. That failure sparked something in me—something that wouldn't have ignited if I had passed easily with a grace of three marks. It was as if the rejection had opened up a hidden reserve of determination I didn't even know I had. I became more focused, more driven, and in the end, when I retook the exam, I didn't just pass—I excelled by scoring 71.0. The message I am trying to give here is, the term '*excel*' is a qualitative term and varies with person to person. Scoring additional 14 marks was “Excel” in my case.

I realized then that destiny has a strange way of shaping our paths. Sometimes, a small failure can lead to greater victories. Had I received those three grace marks, I might have moved on without learning anything significant, complacent with a barely passing grade. But being denied that easy way out made me work harder and smarter, and in the end, I became stronger for it.

That professor's metaphor, which had once confused me, now made perfect sense. I didn't need oxygen from someone else; I needed to find the strength to breathe on my own. And when I finally did, the air had never tasted sweeter.

Principles of Principals

In 2022, I received a special invitation from Mr. Bhoje Gowda, the Member of the Legislative Assembly from the graduate constituency, to address a prestigious gathering of all the principals from Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. The event was held in a grand auditorium, and as I walked in, I was greeted by a crowd of around 220 principals—all seasoned educators, brimming with experience and wisdom. By then, I was the Dean of my own institute, a position that carried its own weight and pride.

As I began my address, I decided to share a personal story, one that was both humbling and filled with lessons from my student days. I spoke about my first failure in college—Sociology. The moment I mentioned the subject, the room's energy shifted, a few

chuckles rippling through the audience. I continued, recounting how I had nervously approached my Sociology teacher, asking for those crucial three grace marks that could save me from failing. And then, I mimicked my teacher's philosophical response about oxygen and nutrients, which had baffled me at the time.

As I shared this story, the audience listened with rapt attention, chuckling at the humorous and relatable nature of a student's plight. But then, as I was about to move on, something unexpected happened.

A figure in the middle row stood up. He cleared his throat and announced, "I am Dr. Vasudeva Kamath. I was your Sociology teacher."

For a moment, I was stunned. I hadn't recognized him among the crowd. The room erupted into laughter, with principals and educators amused by the twist in the tale. Here I was, recounting a story about my failure in Sociology, and the very teacher who had shut down my plea for grace marks was right there, listening to me all along!

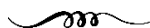
I could feel my face flush as I looked at him, grinning with a mix of embarrassment and admiration. Without hesitation, I walked toward him and, in front of the entire audience, I bowed down and touched his feet. The room erupted in applause, the laughter now mixed with appreciation for the moment of humility and respect. It was a heart-warming, light-hearted spectacle—one of those rare moments in life when the past comes full circle in the most unexpected ways.

A few months later, as if the universe wanted to cement this strange and delightful connection, I received another invitation. This time, it was from Dr. Vasudeva Kamath himself. He had become the principal of one of the colleges in Mangalore, and he had invited me as the Chief Guest for their annual event. It felt surreal—standing on the same stage as the man who had once been my teacher, the very person who had taught me one of the toughest lessons in my academic life. What began as a failure in Sociology had now transformed into a relationship built on mutual respect. By the time

I went there, Dr Kamath was standing with the garland and was waiting for me with bunch of students for escorting me.

In those moments, I realized that life has its own way of weaving narratives—ones that stretch far beyond the pages of textbooks. That small episode from my student days, one filled with disappointment and confusion, had grown into a story of growth, respect, and ultimately, a deeper understanding of the roles we all play in each other's lives. It was not just a meeting of teacher and student, but of two individuals whose paths had been interconnected by fate, humour, and a little bit of grace.

“When you choose peace, it comes with a lot of goodbyes; but I proved otherwise—said by someone and completed by me”



Tide 02

The Ebb Current

Every trimester, I'd eagerly return home for the holidays, where my parents would care for me with warmth and love. But the moment I stepped through the door, reality would hit: I'd have to tell them about my college dues. They needed time to gather the money, often borrowing from others, and sometimes, they'd even pledge their modest gold belongings. The toughest part came when it was time to leave for college again. Until the last minute, I wouldn't know if they had managed to scrape together enough.

I'd watch my father's hands anxiously, waiting to see if he'd reach into his pocket, or if my mother would quietly hand me the money. Most of the time, it was never enough. Yet, after handing it over, they would walk with me to the bus station, staying until the bus finally pulled away. We would cry together, and they'd offer me words of encouragement, urging me to study hard. I'd always promise them I would.

But as soon as I returned to campus, those promises seemed to fade. The story, as it always did, took a different turn.

Series of Failures

After I failed in sociology and statistics, I naïvely believed that things would improve. But I soon discovered that biochemistry, microbiology, and English were no different—they were like the sisters of my earlier failures, waiting to challenge me in their own

ways. Determined not to repeat my mistakes, I began putting in sincere effort. However, as the results would later show, my effort still fell short, unable to lift me into that elusive higher class interval of grades.

Statistics, ironically, began to make more sense to me. I found a strange parallel between my struggles and the concept of statistical curves. Just as the curves in statistics never quite touch the 'X' axis, life, too, never offers complete certainty. There is always something that escapes explanation—some margin of error, a 0.5 to 10% confidence interval. It's as if statistics itself admits that not everything in life can be perfectly correlated or predicted. Some outcomes, like my failures, are influenced by unknown, unaccounted-for factors.

It was humbling to realize that despite all my calculations and efforts, there would always be an element of uncertainty. Maybe it wasn't just about how hard I worked; perhaps there were forces beyond my understanding shaping the outcomes, just like those mysterious factors in statistics that we cannot measure, yet know exist.

Vim Powder: That Scrubbed Away My Dreams

From the third trimester onwards, I transformed into the model student—or so I thought. I was the eager one in class, asking questions, challenging teachers, and feeling like I was on my way to academic glory. Then came the day of reckoning: the practical exam for Fishery Biochemistry. It was simple enough, or so it seemed. They'd give us a mystery substance, and we'd have to identify whether it was protein, fat, or carbohydrate. Easy, right? I had all the fancy tests in my arsenal—Molisch's test for proteins, Barfoed's test for monosaccharides, Seliwanoff's test for sugars. I was ready to ace this.

So, the exam began at 2:00 p.m. sharp. I grabbed the white powder from the petridish near the sink—obviously, this was the sample. I ran it through every test: Molisch's test for proteins, Barfoed, Seliwanoff tests—biochemical tests used to differentiate between aldose and ketose sugars,—you name it, I tried it. And every

single one came back negative. By 4:10 p.m., I was sweating, not from the pressure but from sheer confusion. That's when my roommate, Vinaykumar, strolled in and casually asked what I got for the test. I proudly showed him the petri dish.

He looked at it and immediately burst into laughter. 'Dude,' he said between gasps, 'you've been testing *Vim Powder* for the last two hours!' My heart sank. Turns out, in my haste to conquer the exam, I had mistaken the cleaning powder near the sink for the sample. The actual sample—a colourless solution—had been sitting innocently in a test tube stand the whole time, completely ignored by yours truly.

I ran to our teacher, Mrs. Beena V. Shetty, desperately pleading for extra time. She looked at me, shaking her head with a mix of pity and amusement, and refused to grant me any. Furious and humiliated, I threw my exam papers on the table in a dramatic exit and stormed out of the lab.

Needless to say, I failed the exam. But hey, on the bright side, I did prove that Vim Powder doesn't contain any proteins, fats, or carbohydrates. So, that's something, right?

These jokes spread like wildfire in the hostel, becoming the stuff of legend. As the years passed, the stories evolved—each new batch of students adding their own twist, making the tale of the 'Vim Powder Disaster' even more outlandish. By the time it reached the younger batches, I'd become a kind of mythical figure, known for conducting experiments on kitchen cleaning agents. A few years later, I was chatting with a junior, an up-and-coming aquaculture consultant, when he started telling me *my own* story!

He enthusiastically recounted the whole thing, with flourishes I couldn't help but admire—apparently, I had wrestled with my 'sample' for hours, tried every chemical in the lab, and even begged the janitor for assistance! As he reached the punchline—the moment of realizing it was Vim Powder—I could see the sheer delight in his eyes, expecting a burst of laughter or some nod of appreciation.

Now, I could've easily deflated him by revealing that I was the legendary figure in his story. But no, I had learned a valuable lesson from my son: when someone shares a story, they're not just telling

it; they're seeking a little spotlight, a moment of attention. It's not always about facts—it's about connection, joy, and the thrill of telling a great tale.

So, I didn't disappoint him. I chuckled, nodded along, and let him bask in the glory of being the storyteller. After all, who am I to rob someone of their moment of fame? The Vim Powder catastrophe may have been my most embarrassing academic moment, but in this retelling, it was his chance to shine. Encouragement—sometimes, that's all people are looking for.

The Telegram

I was so frustrated and I missed the final exam for no reason. Few days later, I went and asked for a 'Missed Exams' and madam asked for a valid reason. I said I had received a telegram — The telegraphic postal message, not the one we have now on the smart phones asking me to come back home immediately. She was very logical and critical. 'Well' she said 'Get the telegram'

I was shocked because I did not have any. I said I will get it in the afternoon. I went back to hostel and started collecting the old telegrams which were sent to them. I was looking for a telegram with bad message and asking to come home immediately. I made a collage of telegrams. But for my surprise, all the pieces were in the different colour. I crumbled it and put some mud to make it uniform and look old. Then I showed it to madam and standing in front of her. She straight away looked in to my eyes and asked me whether I had really received any telegram. I said 'No'. She seemed to like it, even though I was bluffing my way through. She gave me a pass, and somehow, I scraped by with a 'C' grade and moved on.

The Pen thief

But deep down, I wasn't satisfied. The desire for revenge lingered, though I'm not sure why—perhaps it was the frustration of knowing I hadn't truly earned my way. One ordinary day, I walked into her office. She wasn't at her desk, and there it was—a beautiful pen, sitting alone, tempting me. In a moment of impulse, I took it, slipping silently out the door.

I never used that pen in her class, perhaps out of guilt, perhaps out of some strange subconscious respect. But months passed, and I forgot the pen's origin. It had become just another object, stripped of its significance. One day, as I sat in the front row, scribbling notes with that same pen, she noticed it. Her eyes locked on it, and in a calm, measured voice, she asked me, 'Is that my pen?'

I paused for a second, feeling the weight of that simple question. I admitted it—'yes,' I said. She didn't accuse me, didn't demand an explanation. She merely asked me to return the pen after class. And that was it. She never mentioned it again, walking away with a coolness that unsettled me more than any lecture or punishment could have.

In her silence, I realized something profound: sometimes, the real punishment lies not in being called out or shamed, but in being left alone with the knowledge of your own wrongdoing. Her restraint spoke volumes. She didn't need to humiliate me—she trusted that I would reflect on my actions, and I did. It was as if she understood that our mistakes, no matter how small, are lessons that life teaches us in subtle ways. The stolen pen became a symbol, not of my revenge, but of my own moral failings.

Her quiet wisdom showed me that people grow not through confrontation, but through reflection. Sometimes, the most powerful response is the one that leaves room for you to discover the lesson yourself.

Thirty five years later, madam became a good friend of my wife and often visit my home. In one of the gathering at officers club at Mangalore, madam was introducing to her friends and said that I was very active and honest fellow during my student days.

I had read about a 'Pen Stealing' story of Motilal Nehru during my school days. Though it may not be a widely documented historical event, the tale is often used to illustrate the importance of instilling moral values from a young age.

The ‘Wing Oyster’

Ah, the unforgettable days of fisheries college, where the lines between education and mischief often blurred like wet paint on a poorly primed canvas. There was this course—an absolute simple subject—called Ecology and Zoogeography in the prestigious Department of Oceanography. Now, before we dive into that, a quick note on Dr. M.P.M. Reddy, our esteemed Head of the Department. Let me put it this way: Unlike me, everyone thought he was great teacher, but to me? His lectures were like background music in a slow-motion documentary about paint drying. His accent? Oh, it was a symphony of syllables that grated on your eardrums. And for reasons known only to the gods themselves, the man had a distinct aversion to girls. But I digress—He passed away very recently. let’s leave him and get to the real fun.

The course, as fate would have it, was taught by none other than Dr. Gangadhara Gowda. A real fan of group work, Dr. Gowda assigned us to little teams of 5-6 members. Our mission: venture into the wild—the Suratkal Beach, and collect samples of the local fauna. Now, our team was a motley crew—Sanju, Shamila, Suresh Kumar, and yours truly. The others? Well, they were the kind of people who highlighted textbooks for fun. Me? Let’s just say my strengths lay in unplanned brilliance and canny improvisation.

While the team carefully collected *Littorina*, *barnacles*, *starfish*, and all those respectable organisms, I... well, I was in my element—spontaneity and chaos. But as the resident artist of the group, my genius was needed for a different task: crafting a magnificent, awe-inspiring chart to showcase our findings. Naturally, I decided to elevate this artistic endeavour by, ahem, “borrowing” a few old preserved specimens from the lab. I mean, who doesn’t love a little creative inspiration, right?

So, a week later, we confidently marched into the department, carrying our assignment with the enthusiasm of knights returning from a victorious quest. Dr. Gowda was ecstatic. He even summoned the other faculty members to marvel at our creation, which, in hindsight, should have been my first clue that trouble was brewing.

Enter Dr. R.J. Katti—an absolute marine biology savant with a sixth sense for spotting troublemakers. He began examining our samples and casually inquired about where we had gathered them.

“Suratkal Beach,” I said with the confidence of a seasoned liar—I mean, a professional scientist. One sample? Sure, that was from Suratkal Beach. The second one? Also, Suratkal Beach. Then came the moment of truth—the *pièce de resistance*—the Wing Oyster.

“Where did you get this one?” Dr. Katti asked, his voice suddenly laced with suspicion.

I, in my infinite wisdom, repeated, “Suratkal Beach.”

At this point, the room erupted in laughter, and I started to get the feeling that something was amiss. Dr. Katti, now wearing the expression of a man who had caught someone trying to pass off a cat as a lion, turned serious. “Are you sure?” he asked again.

“Absolutely!” I nodded with all the false confidence I could muster.

And then came the gut punch: “You see, Wing Oysters are only found in the mud banks of Alappuzha, Kerala—not exactly a quick commute from Suratkal Beach.”

Oops.

Caught in my web of well-meaning deceit, I did what any honest, upstanding citizen would do—I fessed up. “Fine, fine! I took it from the lab!”

What followed was an explosion of laughter from every professor in the room. My masterpiece of a chart had turned into an impromptu comedy show. But in the end, they appreciated the art (and my honesty, of course). Dr. Katti even complimented me on my ability to “return specimens in a much more fashionable way” than when they left the lab.

So there you have it: a tale of scientific inquiry, artistic creativity, and one very well-travelled Wing Oyster.

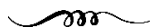
I never set out to craft stories; they simply unfolded along the way. But now, I realize that one must consciously create stories worth remembering in old age. It is essential to leave traces of our journey, some imprint on history, for without them, both society and the institutions we serve will soon forget us. Today, I find myself teaching a few courses to undergraduates, yet I know only a handful of their names. Not because my memory fails me, but because of the poor interaction by the students.

As the great writer Salman Rushdie, the Indian-British novelist, wisely says, "We need stories." From the very beginning, this need is innate. The moment children feel secure in their comforts, their first instinct is to ask for a story. Why? Because stories are the vessels of meaning, the mirrors through which we understand our world, our place in it, and even our future. Yet, how long can we keep feeding them fables from the past, tales borrowed from distant lands and times? At some point, we must craft our own narratives, ones that reflect our unique experiences, challenges, and hopes.

Stories aren't just entertainment; they are the blueprints of life. They teach, they guide, they warn, and they inspire. If we fail to create our own stories, we risk losing our voice, our lessons, our wisdom. The stories we create today will either light a spark of inspiration in the next generation, urging them to rise and take bold steps, or they will serve as cautionary tales, warning them of the pitfalls on life's journey. Either way, the act of storytelling is essential, not only for personal expression but for the survival of wisdom itself.

Without stories, there is no continuity, no sense of legacy, no anchor to the past or vision for the future. We are not merely passive receivers of the tales of others; we are the authors of our own, shaping narratives that will ripple through time. Our stories are our gift to the generations that follow, offering them both a map and a compass to navigate the uncertain terrains of life. If we do not write them, if we do not take ownership of our lives as stories worth telling, we become forgettable, lost in the sea of silence.

So, let us create stories—real, profound, and resonant ones. Stories that will inspire the young to dream higher and warn them against paths that lead nowhere. For it is through our stories that we will live on, far beyond the confines of our time on this earth.



The Counsellor Letter

In the grand theatre of student life, there is a role known as the “Counsellor,” a mentor who was supposed to shepherd us through our academic journey. This counsellor wasn’t just a teacher, but someone assigned to guide a small flock of 8-9 students, a sort of guardian of our grade cards and academic fate. Every trimester, they’d collect our marks, counsel us—or at least pretend to—and then write a report, a letter, to our unsuspecting parents. Some teachers, of course, did this more out of ritual than real concern, going through the motions without a second thought. One such figure in my life was Dr. Ramachandra Bhatta. He was an economics teacher, a man of few words, delivered in a low, barely audible voice that lacked any spark of inspiration. He was sober, quiet, and frankly uninspiring.

But one day, Dr. Bhatta’s letter found its way to my home, igniting a storm. You see, both my parents were illiterate. They couldn’t read or write a single line in any language. And so, when they received this official-looking letter, they did what any trusting village folk would do—they took it to our neighbours for help. And oh, did the news spread quickly. Before I knew it, the entire neighbourhood was buzzing with the fact that I had, quite spectacularly, failed in most of my subjects.

Now, this wasn’t the first time a letter of academic doom had graced my family’s doorstep. My older brother, Ananda Murthy, had an arrangement of getting his report letters redirected back to him—

clever move, I must say. But not me. No, I had to face the music head-on. When I finally went home, I walked into a scene straight out of a tragic play. Both of my parents, bless their hearts, were in tears. They hadn't understood the grades, but they'd certainly understood the shame.

I stood there, silent, not a word leaving my lips. What could I say? My failures were out in the open, laid bare for everyone to see. The weight of their disappointment was crushing, and I could feel my own heart sinking deeper into despair. Yet, I couldn't break down. Not in front of them.

When it came time for me to return to Mangalore, my parents, as they always did, accompanied me to the bus station. It was there, at that dusty station, with the hum of buses and the chatter of passengers around us, that something inside me stirred. I couldn't let this be the end of my story. I had to speak. Gathering all the courage I could muster, tears in my eyes, I made a bold proclamation—one that would change the course of my life.

“Don't worry too much about me,”

I said, my voice trembling, yet determined.

“One day, I will make you proud. Just believe in me.”

It wasn't a grand speech, but in that moment, it felt like the most important thing I had ever said. My parents looked at me, unsure but hopeful. They didn't fully understand, but they trusted me. With that small spark of faith, I boarded the bus.

The next day, I walked straight into the counsellor's chamber, no longer the same student who had been crushed by failure and shame. Something had shifted. I had made a promise—not just to my parents, but to myself. The world could laugh at my mistakes, but I would write my own story, one that would be remembered. And so, the journey began...

Beeda and its Economics

There was this small, narrow chamber near the seminar hall, where 3-4 teachers would sit, perched like the wise sages of the

ancient world, discussing lofty matters as if the fate of the universe hung on their every word. You'd think they were running a parallel government with how seriously they took themselves. Anyway, I had no choice but to walk into this den of infinite wisdom to meet my counsellor. But, of course, who do I find first? The most irritating of them all—Dr. V.G. Bhat. He was notorious for his firm belief that I would never pass the English course. Never. It was practically his life's mission to make me believe it too.

The moment I stepped in, before my counsellor could even breathe, Dr. Bhat pounced, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"So, what's the matter?"

He asked, giving me that look. You know, the one that says, "I already know you're in trouble."

"Uh, sir, my grades," I said, trying to keep it brief, hoping for a quick exit.

He raised an eyebrow, as if I'd just told him something both obvious and unnecessary. "Yes, what about your grades?" he sneered, that smirk of his growing wider.

I shifted uncomfortably, glancing at my counsellor, who, by the way, looked utterly clueless. The man just smiled at me, as if that was helpful in any way. Great, I thought. No backup here.

"I'll explain to my counsellor, sir," I said, trying to steer the conversation back to someone who was supposed to help me, not roast me alive.

But Dr. Bhat was relentless. "If your parents are illiterate, why shouldn't we write them a letter?" he muttered, just loud enough to get under my skin. Oh, the rage. A flood of responses filled my head, none of them appropriate for a student to say to a professor.

Before I could unleash my fury, the English teacher, who I hadn't even noticed was paying attention, jumped in with his own line of questioning. "What's your age?" he asked, completely out of the blue.

"Umm, 19," I said, wondering where this was going.

“See, you’ve failed in many subjects. You should really consider leaving this college,” he said, like he was announcing the weather or something equally mundane. Just like that, my academic fate was sealed in his mind.

Meanwhile, my counsellor—bless him—was still scribbling away at something, pretending to be busy with some grave task. No help there either.

I couldn’t take it anymore.

“What do I do after leaving this course?”

I asked, half-expecting some generic advice about working harder or finding my passion.

But no, the English teacher had other plans. He leaned forward, a grin forming on his face as he shared his brilliant solution.

“You should open a Pan Beeda shop in front of a bar or wine shop.”

What?

He was dead serious.

“On an average day, even if 100 people come by and buy beeda worth Rs. 5, you’ll make Rs. 500 a day. That’s Rs. 15,000 a month! Here, you’re wasting Rs. 600 a month on your fees. Just think about it,” he said, like he’d just handed me the key to financial success.

Both of them—Dr. Bhat and the English teacher—burst into laughter, as if they had just cracked the greatest joke of the century. I stood there, half in disbelief, half in a silent fury.

And then, to add insult to injury, Mr. Krishna Bhat, the statistics teacher, strolled in, casually chewing pan like it was the most natural thing in the world. He took one look at the scene, grinned, and—because apparently this was a pan appreciation society—offered some to the English teacher.

Of course, Dr. Bhat wasted no time narrating my tragic saga to Mr. Krishna Bhat, who nodded in agreement, pan juice swirling in his mouth. The statistics teacher, being the logical numbers guy he

was, decided to back up the plan with some calculations. He pulled out a calculator, punched in a few numbers, and with a satisfied smile said,

“It’s a fantastic idea! You’ll be raking it in.”

I stood there, torn between rage and utter disbelief. Here I was, trying to salvage my academic life, and they were mapping out my future as a beeda vendor with the enthusiasm of investment bankers planning a billion-dollar IPO. What a day!

I stood there for a moment, quietly collecting my thoughts, and then with a heavy heart, I turned to my counsellor. With all the humility I could muster, I requested him, “Please, don’t send that letter to my parents.” I was at a crossroads, desperate to shield them from my failures. It’s strange, though—I can’t even recall whether he agreed or if the issue simply faded away as time passed. What I do remember is that by the time I reached my third year, a certain sense of stability had crept into my life. Perhaps life had a way of smoothing out the sharpest edges over time.

But there was something that stayed with me—an intensity, almost a fire—that burned inside me whenever I thought about Dr. V.G. Bhat and Krishna Bhat. Their cold, calculated strategy to crush my spirit wasn’t just about mocking my failures; it felt like an attempt to snuff out my dreams. They weren’t just teachers that day; they became symbols of all those forces in life that tell you to abandon your hopes, to settle for less, to take the easy path. And perhaps it was because of them that I became more determined than ever to prove myself, to resist their grim vision of my future.

In that moment of adversity, I made a bold declaration—not to them, but to myself and to anyone who would listen. On one of the biggest stages I ever stood on, I proclaimed, “I will head this institute someday.” It wasn’t just a wish or an act of defiance—it was a deep-seated conviction, one that came from the core of my being. I had to say it, to vocalize my dreams in the face of those who would reduce them to ashes.

And as life would have it, that statement, spoken with all the courage I could summon, became a prophecy. It happened. I did lead

the very institute where, years earlier, my dreams were almost crushed under the weight of mockery and cynicism.

Looking back, it feels almost poetic. Life is often like that—an interplay of forces that push and pull us, test us, and force us to reckon with our own resolve. What seems like a moment of despair or defeat can be the very spark that ignites something larger within us, something that compels us to rise beyond the ordinary, to transcend the limitations others impose on us.

Those moments of belittlement, of being told to settle for less, are often the ones that shape our deepest philosophies. They teach us that the world is full of people who will try to clip our wings. But they also remind us that our dreams are not fragile things; they are resilient, and they grow stronger when tested. In the end, it is not the words of naysayers that define us, but how we respond to them. And in that response, we carve out our own destiny.

The world may try to write your story for you, but it's your voice that will echo in the halls of time.

Farewell to Dr H P C Shetty-The founding Director

There was a man, a legend really, named Prof. H.P. Chandrashekar Shetty, who was revered as the father of the first fisheries college in the country. To say he had a presence would be an understatement. He was always impeccably dressed in a safari suit, his English flawless, his voice like a finely tuned instrument. The way he walked, the way he commanded attention—there was an elegance to him, a certain finesse that radiated leadership. You could feel the gravity of his presence from a mile away. He didn't just run the college; he embodied it.

Over the course of 18 years as the Director of Instructions, he set a bar so high that when he finally retired, eight or nine deans followed him—and not a single one could match his pace, his direction, or his vision. They all tried to pull the cart forward, but none could steer it with the same commanding grace that Prof. Shetty did.

May 31st, 1989—his retirement day—was a momentous occasion. The entire college had gathered to bid farewell to the man who had built and nurtured it with his own hands. The air was thick with emotion and admiration. Only two students were chosen to speak about him on that prestigious dais. One was Dr. Rajkumar Poojary—a fellow who had already mastered the art of politics, even during his college days. He had dabbled in local body elections, and, like many politicians, tasted defeat early on. The other student selected was me.

The atmosphere in the auditorium was serious, almost reverential. Dr. B.M. Hegde, a renowned cardiologist and a great orator was the chief guest, and the hall was packed to the rafters with faculty, staff, and students. You could hear a pin drop. This was no ordinary retirement ceremony—it was the end of an era.

My turn came. I stepped onto the dais, feeling the weight of the moment, but also with a mischievous glint in my eye. No formal salutation, no carefully crafted speech. I looked straight at Prof. Shetty, who was seated there with his characteristic calm and dignity. Without a pause, I said,

“Sir, someday, I wish to become the Director of Instruction... bless me.”

For a brief moment, the room held its breath. Then, I couldn’t resist, so I added, “But, sir, do I have to become bald?”

You see, Prof. Shetty was bald, and so was Dr. B.M. Hegde. The entire hall erupted into laughter—not just because of the baldness, but because of the sheer audacity of my ambition, and the humour I laced it with. In that moment, I had cut through the formality and tension in the room. The laughter wasn’t mocking; it was joyous, it was a release. They weren’t laughing at the fact that I had dared to dream of taking Prof. Shetty’s place—they were laughing because they could see, in that moment, a future where it might just happen.

That day wasn’t just about the end of Prof. Shetty’s tenure; it was about the possibility of what could come next. Even as we were saying goodbye to a giant of a man, there was this undercurrent of hope, of ambition, and of dreams yet to be realized.

I'm not sure if Prof. Shetty ever imagined that one day, someone like me—standing there making jokes about his bald head—would indeed walk in his shoes. But life has a funny way of fulfilling the promises we make, sometimes even in the most unexpected ways.

Dr B M Hegde gave an excellent speech and many people and associations brought flowers, mementoes to offer it the Prof. Shetty and his wife Mrs Manorama. Finally, they all packed the offerings and packed to the Director's car.

Standing Near Chappal Stand

I was already basking in the limelight after my bold and cheeky speech, feeling a strange mix of pride and nervous energy. Suddenly, as the applause settled and people began milling about, one of the senior professors approached me. "Hey, you," he said, "You're on duty now. Go accompany Prof. Shetty's family as part of the formal farewell ceremony." I was caught off guard but instantly agreed, eager to soak in the experience of being close to the legend himself. Little did I know, this would turn into one of the most bizarre experiences of my life.

We all piled into the car, and I found myself sitting alongside Prof. Shetty's family. Honestly, I can't recall a single word from the conversation in that car—perhaps because I was too busy trying to act composed, hoping they wouldn't notice my racing heart. My mind was still buzzing from my earlier public declaration about wanting to be the Director of Instruction one day.

We finally arrived at the Director's bungalow—a grand British-era structure, oozing colonial charm with its imposing size and sprawling gardens. I helped the family unload their belongings, feeling oddly important, like some ceremonial helper in a period drama. After carrying the last of the luggage, I found myself standing awkwardly near the chappal stand, unsure of what to do next.

Prof. Shetty, clearly weary from the long day, muttered something under his breath (which I didn't quite catch), walked inside, and promptly locked the door behind him. I stood there, blinking, my brain still processing what had just happened. There

were a few chairs nearby, but for some reason, I didn't sit. Maybe I thought sitting would somehow break the spell of professionalism I had tried to maintain all day. So, like a statue, I stood there... and waited.

Minutes turned into an hour, and there I was, still standing by the chappal stand like a forgotten butler. I could hear the faint sounds of water running inside, followed by the clink of a coffee cup. The house was quiet except for the occasional creak of old wood. I began to wonder if I had somehow been turned into part of the furniture.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Prof. Shetty emerged, looking fresh from a shower, his hair (or lack thereof) still glistening from the water. With a coffee cup in hand and a relaxed smile, he stopped dead in his tracks when he saw me still standing there.

"Hey! What are you still doing here?" he exclaimed, startled.

I blinked, confused. "Sir, you told me to wait," I stammered.

"No, I didn't! I told you to go!" He furrowed his brow, clearly puzzled by my persistence.

I was equally puzzled. "Sir, I swear you said 'wait.'" I was still holding on to the idea that I had been following some unspoken instruction.

He shook his head, clearly amused. "Where's the car?"

I hesitated, glancing at the empty driveway. "Sir, it left."

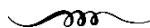
At this point, Prof. Shetty was visibly trying to suppress a smile. "Good lord, what have we here? Alright, alright," he sighed, still chuckling to himself, "I'll call someone to drop you back to the hostel."

And that's how, almost by accident, I found myself stuck at the Director's bungalow for an hour, waiting for instructions that never came. Little did I know, 24 years later, I'd be staying in that very same bungalow—this time not as a hapless student, but as someone who had finally fulfilled his dream of leading the institute. This is how nature aligns itself with those who dare to dream big.

I wrote about this entire ridiculous episode in one of my books, *Meenu Mattu Naanu* (which translates to '*Fish and Me*'). It's a story I still tell, partly because it's hilarious, but mostly because it's a reminder of how absurd and unpredictable life can be. You can wait by a chappal stand for hours, feeling forgotten, only to realize later that one day, it would be yours.

A few months before his passing, Dr. Shivaprakash and I visited him at his house. I shared these stories, and he shed tears filled with mixed emotions. He said, "I am happy that the institute is in the best hands," as I was the Dean of the very institute I once assured him I would lead. I fulfilled my commitment by rising to the position of Head of the Institute, a pledge I made to him on the day of his retirement in 1989. I also assured him that 'I would realize the vision he had for our institution and carry it forward.'

"We suffer more often in imagination than in the reality"



The Cultural Extravaganza

The university treated the cultural activities as ‘Co-Curricular’ activities; not as an ‘Extra-Curricular’. There were great teachers like Prof. R J Katti, Dr Radhakrishnan, Prof. Indrani Karuna Sagar and Dr S M Shivaprakash etc. They used to involve to the minute management and observe everything we do and guide us in a right way. In fact, I used to like all these teachers except Dr Radhakrishna. He was always biased and used favour only Hindi and English speaking students; especially girls.

Eve teasing-The Mime

There was a mime selection trial going on, and it was no ordinary event. The seniors, a bunch of seasoned seniors—Madhu Nanjappa, Vijay Anand, Suman Karyappa, Poonacha, Sanju, Rajeev Chopra, and the graceful Yamuna Yermal and Huda Ahmed—were already there, deeply engrossed in rehearsing. These folks had everything: fluency in Hindi, English, and an air of experience that made them seem untouchable. Meanwhile, Swamy and I, the underdogs, waited in the side wings for hours, eagerly anticipating our turn. Little did we know, the selection process was more of a staged "drama" than an actual trial. The team had already been handpicked by Dr. Radhakrishnan, based on his special connections with the students.

The theme of the mime? ‘Eve teasing.’ Now, let me tell you, I didn’t even know such a term existed in the English language. The practice session began, and Dr. Radhakrishnan, with his stylish English and flair for drama, took command of the stage. There was

Yamuna, standing gracefully in the middle of the stage, with Suman—this almost tall, handsome guy—coming up to her, giving her “the look.” And there she was, acting all irritated and pretending to be totally uninterested, like some old Bollywood scene.

I was confused, standing there trying to make sense of it all. So, in my usual clueless way, I leaned over towards Dr Radhakrishna and asked in Kannada, "Sir...*Enidu*—what's this?"

Dr. Radhakrishnan looked at me as if I'd just asked him to explain quantum physics. "You don't understand," he said, waving me off and continuing to direct the mime actors, his English rolling off his tongue in a grandiose fashion.

But I couldn't hold back. Something about the scene didn't sit right with me, so I asked again, "Why is the girl rejecting him, even though he's handsome?"

The entire room erupted into laughter. It was like someone had hit the comedy jackpot. Dr. Radhakrishnan looked at me with disbelief, then said, “Hey, look at this funny guy! Can you believe him?”

And I wasn't done yet. With my signature deadpan delivery, I added, "If the girl's going to reject someone, shouldn't the guy be ugly? I mean, I could play that role perfectly!"

That was it. Everyone burst into uncontrollable laughter, literally rolling on the floor. Even the seniors who had been so serious moments ago were doubled over, clutching their stomachs. Dr. Radhakrishnan shook his head, still laughing, but I knew I'd made my mark that day—as a mime actor. The mime theme might have been "eve teasing," but that day, the real show was the humour I brought to the stage.

Suman—a stocky, thick-necked guy was shocked the I way changed the entire situation. I was asked to take on his role, and I did it so well that I ended up replacing him as the lead. Though Suman still stayed on the team, playing a different part, I had stolen the spotlight with the lead role.

We went to the Youth Festival in Bangalore, where we took first place. This win earned us the chance to compete at the zonal level which was held at Mysore where universities from all four states participated.

The Bhangra Dance

Somehow, there were a few brave girls who were bold enough to step into the spotlight for cultural activities. Madhu, Chopra, and the rest of the gang decided it was high time to bring girls onto the stage for a dance performance, but there was one problem—none of us knew how to choreograph such a thing. That’s when they stumbled upon this Sardar medical student from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore (KMC), and roped him in to be our dance guru.

Now, the song they picked was no walk in the park. It was a popular old folk song in Punjabi, “*Thootak... Thootak... Thootak... Thoothiya*,” which might sound fun, but let me tell you, it was a linguistic nightmare for someone like me who didn’t know Hindi—forget Punjabi! But I was tasked with learning the song. So, with a cassette player as my only guide and after countless hours of pressing rewind and play, I somehow managed to get the hang of it.

Sanju was on the dholak, giving it his best beat, while Swamy was on the maracas, trying to keep the rhythm going. We were all in this together, figuring out the moves and the beats as we went along.

In the history of the agriculture university, since its inception in 1969, no one had ever seen boys and girls share the stage for a dance performance. This was ground-breaking stuff! So, there we were in 1989, with four boys and four girls, setting the stage on fire. The whole auditorium went wild—cheering, clapping, and probably not believing what they were seeing. It was pure madness, and to top it all off, we snagged first place!

But the story didn’t end there. During the valedictory function, none other than Dr. K. Krishnamurthy, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, saw us in our vibrant costumes and asked us to perform again. He hadn’t seen the

original performance but heard so much about it that he couldn't resist. He absolutely loved it!

And just like that, our little dance team went on to represent the university at the South Zone level. We were staying right behind the Hotel 'King's Court,' at Rao Bahaddur Choultry. We spent the entire night practicing our dance routine. The next day, Sanju couldn't find the sticks to play the dholak, but he improvised brilliantly with toothbrushes instead. The sound he produced was extraordinary, sending waves of energy through the 'Kalamandir'—one of the largest auditoriums of that time, with an audience of 2,400 people. What started as a risky, bold experiment turned into an unforgettable experience, proving that even in agriculture university, where cultural traditions were slow to change, a little Punjabi folk magic could spark a revolution on stage!

***Poleesariddare Echcharike*—Beware of Police**

This was the play written by our great journalist P. Lankesh. It was an absurd play on biography of 'Samsa'⁶—a playwright. He suffered a peculiar disease 'Persecution Complex'.⁷ He was very afraid of 'Polices'. In fact, there were no issues; but he imagined someone is following him and police are trying catch him. Deveraju T N did the 'Samsa' role and I played his brother role who tried to bring him to normalcy and finally I become mad. Renuka Prasad, TKC Gowda and others acted in it. Ashok gave great background singing which the play to the next level. Naveen Kumar H S directed the play. There also we bagged prize.

While standing on the stage, there was always a wave of catcalls and mocking from the audience. Rivalry between campuses was fierce, and disturbing the performers was one of their main tactics to demoralize us. It was all part of the game, a strategy to throw us off our rhythm. But I had learned early on that the only way to handle

⁶ A. N. Swamy Venkatadri Iyer (13 January 1898 – 14 February 1939), known by his penname as Samsa, was an early 20th century's Indian historical playwright in Kannada language.

⁷ An irrational and obsessive feeling or fear that one is the object of collective hostility or ill-treatment on the part of others.

such disruptions was not to react with anger or frustration, but with calm and boldness. I was determined not to let them rattle me, and that determination allowed me to maintain the flow of our drama without missing a beat. This boldness not only impressed my own campus but even earned me a certain respect among the students from rival campuses. They might have tried to break me, but in the process, they ended up appreciating the strength I showed.

In 1994, things started to change. The agriculture students, recognizing the need for more structure and professionalism, established a cultural team called “Bhoomika.” It was a natural evolution, but it marked the end of our reign. Until 1992, we ruled the cultural scene at the university. We were free-spirited, spontaneous, and took pride in our unique, sometimes chaotic style. But times change, and the students who followed us sought to bring more order, more refinement to the art of performance. Bhoomika became highly professional, and though the spirit remained, the energy shifted.

However, there’s something deeper that happened during those years—a bond developed between students from different streams. Despite our intense rivalry, we became close friends. It was as if the competition drew us closer, helping us realize that beneath the surface, we were all striving for the same sense of belonging, the same recognition. Even today, that bond remains unbroken. I’m still part of the Bhoomika team in spirit. A few years ago, they created a WhatsApp group, and to my surprise, I’m still a part of it.

It’s a reminder that while victories fade and new teams take the stage, the connections we make, the relationships we build, are what truly endure. It’s not about who ruled the university or who won the prizes—what mattered was the unity we discovered in the shared passion for art and performance. Time moves on, but the friendships and memories we forged remain timeless, echoing through the years like a well-loved story passed down from one generation to the next.

The Choir

I used to sing folk songs pretty well, or at least that’s what I thought. There were times when I even managed to win first place—

probably because the competition wasn't as tough. Then came Swamy A V, Gajendra, and the others, all of whom sang better than I did. Still, I hung on to second place for a while. But then, Ashok showed up, with his smooth voice and natural talent. That's when I got demoted to third place—my singing career took a nosedive!

But you know, I wasn't one to back down easily. I had another talent up my sleeve—my organizing skills. If I couldn't be the lead singer, I'd head the 'Group Song' team! So, I gathered the best singers and put together a squad. Dinesh H Kaller, who now happens to be the Director of Fisheries in Karnataka, had a knack for stirring up drama just for fun. He'd go around teasing the other singers, sparking little rivalries and getting everyone riled up. The tension got so thick at one point that I had no choice but to include Srinivas Kulkarni—a truly eccentric singer—and another aspiring singer as our "technical assistant" just to keep the peace.

Despite the chaos, our group somehow kept winning prizes at the youth festivals. It was like a miracle in itself. Whether or not I actually won any individual awards didn't matter; I was forever registered in the college's collective memory as "The Singer"—a title that has stuck with me even today.

And now, karaoke arrived on the scene. Suddenly, even Dinesh, with his trusty pen drive full of Rajkumar classics, became a star. He'd belt out those impossibly difficult songs with all the confidence in the world, while his officers applauded and praised him like he was a living legend. Seeing that, I decided it was time to quietly retire my vocal cords. During one of the recent 'Alumni Meets,' two of friends after complete 'Intestinal Oil Massage (IoM)' Thippeswamy and Umesh D kept on singing till everyone leaves. Ever since, I've been a bit hesitant to pick up the mic!

The Dumb-Charades

The whole era was a cultural explosion, buzzing with excitement and energy. To tackle my lingering 'inferiority complex,' I threw myself into every possible event, regardless of how clueless I was. One event, in particular, stood out—dumb charades. It was a popular game at the "Fishco Festival," and while everyone around me,

especially the regional engineering college guys, were absolutely brilliant, I wasn't exactly brimming with confidence. Madhu Nanjappa and Ravikiran's team were legends, and I had serious doubts about competing because it required a solid vocabulary, something I wasn't too sure about.

But then, destiny came calling. Vinay, Sanjunath, and I formed an unlikely team. Despite my hesitations, we decided to dive into the game. Sanju, knowing I had a knack for slangs and streetwise phrases, made a plan. He would give me subtle cues to lead me toward the right slang, and once I cracked those, Vinay would step in and string together the perfect sentence. It was an unexpected formula for success!

Against all odds, we emerged as the stars of the event, just a notch below the legendary Madhu and his team. That event flipped the switch in my confidence. We didn't stop there. Our dynamic trio started taking part in events across different institutes, racking up victories and leaving our inferiority complexes in the dust. It was the beginning of a great adventure, one where our bond grew stronger with every challenge, and I learned that sometimes, it's the most unexpected collaborations that lead to the biggest wins!

Prof. Katti Sir and Me

Prof. Katti was one of those teachers who made you feel seen. He genuinely liked me and always appreciated my creative side. I remember sketching the famous S L Haladankar's painting "Lady and a Lamp" and gifting it to him. He loved it so much that he framed it and kept it on his desk, behind glass, right up until his retirement. Every time he saw me, he would say something nice about my artwork, never failing to acknowledge my skills.

Feeling proud of that bond, I decided to introduce my family to him. One day, during a college event, I invited my brother, mother, and a few others, hoping to impress them by letting them meet the professor who always had good things to say about me. I thought it would be one of those picture-perfect moments. And sure enough, there was no twist—at least not at first. As expected, Prof. Katti praised me in front of everyone. He even said, "We don't want to let

Shivakumar go. We want him here for many more years.” My family was over the moon, and I felt a deep sense of pride.

But here’s where life decided to add its own twist. It turns out that I would, in fact, stay on campus for a lot longer than planned—not because of any grand gesture or promotion, but because I failed in Prof. Katti’s subject, ‘Marine Biology.’

The irony hit hard. The very professor who wanted me to stay ended up contributing to the reason I remained in college for extra years. His words, “We want him here for many more years,” had a way of manifesting in the most unexpected way. Life has its funny ways of ensuring you fulfil the promises you didn’t even know you were making.

Bruce Lee once said *“Don’t ever speak negativity about yourself, even as a joke. Your body does not know the difference. Words are energy and cast spells, that is why it’s called spellings. Change the way you speak about yourself and you can change the life.”*

I wasn’t always aware of these deeper philosophies, but one thing was clear to me from early on—‘I just believed in myself.’ Life, I figured, is like an election with only one vote that truly counts, and that’s the vote you cast for yourself. If you don’t stand by yourself, who else will? That realization hit me hard one day, and from then on, I decided to live with a principle that I called “Harmless Ego”—the kind of self-respect that doesn’t hurt others but reinforces your own worth. It’s about knowing your value without diminishing the value of others. Alongside that, I cultivated an unshakable optimism, believing that no matter how tough the situation, I could make it through. I was often criticized for loving myself. Dr Manoj Sharma a leading aquaculture consultant said recently *‘I am one of the self-obsessed person.’* I smiled, moved on and never changed.

This shift in perspective wasn’t just about surviving; it was about thriving. I realized that if you don’t love yourself, you lose the only guaranteed source of strength in this world—your own belief. From that, I coined a saying that I’ve carried with me ever since: “If you know me, you can’t be a pessimist.”

What I meant was that my presence, my energy, and my outlook on life were so rooted in optimism that anyone who truly knew me would naturally be drawn away from negativity. I made it my mission to exude that optimism everywhere I went, and in doing so, I discovered that self-love wasn't selfish—it was essential. It became a quiet rebellion against the pessimism of the world, a silent vote of confidence cast every single day, for myself, by myself.

Loving yourself isn't about arrogance; it's about recognizing that if you don't back your own dreams, no one else will do it for you. And from that space of belief, even the toughest of challenges start to look like stepping stones rather than obstacles.

“A wise man learns from history; otherwise, he becomes a part of it. —Dr Magada”

Tide 05

The Kirick Party

When I watched *Three Idiots*—A famous Hindi movie of Amir Khan, I found myself sitting there, not laughing as much as everyone else. Not because it wasn’t funny, but because we’d already lived most of it—two decades earlier, no less! Every ridiculous, rebellious thing in that movie, except for the childbirth scene, was like a déjà vu of our college days. By the time we hit our final year, a few of us—Vinay, Dinesh, Umesh, and myself—decided that if we were going to be in class, we might as well make it memorable, even if that meant making nonsense a conscious part of the experience.

One particular day still sticks with me. It was Dr. Shivananda Murthy’s class—*Aquaculture 2.0* or something. He was explaining about the berried prawns with all the seriousness of a scientist. But, of course, we weren’t paying much attention. Instead, we were whispering, laughing, and causing our usual commotion. Dr. Murthy started glaring at us, his wild-eyed stare burning a hole through our side of the classroom.

Dinesh, ever the instigator, nudged me and whispered, “Ask him a question, man!”

We were being so loud that even Dr. Murthy could hear bits and pieces of what we were saying, but I wasn’t about to give in that easily. I would have shot back at Dinesh, “Why should I ask? You ask!”

But Dinesh, with that devilish grin, had already set me up, and somehow, I took the bait. Before I knew it, I was raising my hand,

and all eyes turned to me, including the professor's, who looked as though he was bracing himself for some idiocy. And boy, did I deliver.

"Sir," I began, trying to sound all serious, "what's the male-to-female ratio in berried prawns?"

For a second, there was silence. Then, the entire class erupted in laughter. You see, "berried" meant egg-carrying females! The whole point was that these prawns were females, laden with eggs, and there was no question of male-to-female ratios.

Dr. Murthy just stood there, half stunned, half amused, shaking his head as if he was trying to figure out how someone like me had made it this far in the program. Meanwhile, I was trying to keep a straight face, though inside, I was laughing just as hard as everyone else.

That moment was quintessential of our final year: full of bold stupidity, with just enough charm to get away with it. We weren't just students anymore—we were the class clowns, the pranksters, the ones who would take a joke too far, only to make the entire room burst into laughter, teachers included. That ridiculous question about berried prawns was just one of many moments where we managed to blur the line between knowledge and nonsense. And honestly, those moments are the ones I remember most fondly.

Dr. Murthy, with his usual deadpan humour, looked at me and said, "Asking about the male-to-female ratio in berried prawns is like watching *Ramayana* and then questioning the actual relationship between Rama and Seetha."

The class erupted again, laughter echoing through the room. I could barely hear myself think, but I wasn't about to back down. Trying to regain some composure, I said, "See, sir, we're students. It's in our job description to ask the wrong questions. Your job is to correct us and give us the right answers!"

The laughter still hadn't died down, and at that moment, I was feeling like I had to make a grand exit. So, with the confidence of someone who just delivered a stand-up comedy act, I casually

grabbed my book, tucked it under my arm, and walked right out of the classroom, much to the amusement of my classmates. I could hear the giggles trailing behind me, but I was already planning my next move.

Where to go? Well, the Director's office, of course. So, I marched straight to Dr. T.J. Varghese's chamber, fully prepared to share my grievances and perhaps impress him with my boldness. But as luck would have it, the Director wasn't even there. It was like the universe was conspiring against my grand plan for some righteous retribution.

Undeterred, I pivoted and headed straight to our staff advisor, Sudindra V. Gadagkar. Gadagkar was known for his sharp intellect and philosophical mind. He was the type of teacher who could confuse you with wisdom. And that's exactly what happened. I explained the whole incident, expecting some strategic advice. Instead, he started spouting deep philosophy about life, education, and something about how prawns don't care about ratios in the grand scheme of things. By the end of it, I wasn't sure if I was there for revenge or to attain enlightenment.

But regardless of his philosophical tangent, one thing was clear—we weren't going to let Dr. Murthy off that easy. My friends and I had already decided: revenge was inevitable, and it was going to be sweet. We just had to figure out how. Maybe it wouldn't be today, maybe not tomorrow, but Dr. Murthy's days of mocking our absurd questions were numbered. Well, at least, that's what we thought.

Attendance

Myself, Vinay, and Dinesh decided to attend Dr. Murthy's class, which, for a change, was being held in the seminar hall instead of the usual lab attached to the Department of Aquaculture. The class was scheduled to start at 2:00 p.m., but, as usual, we were fashionably late—about 5 to 10 minutes. We slipped in quietly, or so we thought. Dr. Murthy, with his usual vigor, carried on without a break and kept teaching until 5:30 p.m. We let that slide, no big deal—we excused the man. But as soon as the class was over and he made his way to

his chamber, we went right after him. The mission? Get our attendance marked.

"Sir, about the attendance," I began.

He was unfazed. In his typical, serious attitude, he simply said, "No."

I wasn't about to let that slide. "Come on, sir, we were just 5-10 minutes late, but you took an extra 30 minutes! We didn't say a word about that. So, surely, you have to give us attendance!"

That threw him off a bit, and he stammered, "As a teacher, I have the liberty to do so!"

He stormed into his chamber, clearly furious, and sat down at his desk. That's when Vinay, already fuming, couldn't hold back.

"You should have informed us earlier if you planned to keep us there for extra time. We could have spent those three hours in the library instead of sitting there listening to you drone on!" He was so worked up that he shoved the visitor chairs placed in front of the teacher's desk.

Now, Dinesh was a whole different flavour of trouble—calm on the surface, but his style of messing with people was so subtle that new folks didn't even realize they were being harassed. This was his time to shine.

"Relax, guys, let's give the man some time to think," Dinesh said, like some zen master, as he picked up the attendance register from Dr. Murthy's table. "Sir won't say no." He leaned in, feigning concern, and turned to the teacher, "Sir, these two are a bit immature. Let's just end this, shall we? Just mark the attendance," he said, coolly handing the pen over to Dr. Murthy like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Dr. Murthy, cornered by this sly Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) move from Dinesh, had no way out. He gave in, much to his frustration, and marked the attendance. Dinesh had successfully convinced him, with that calm, deceptive politeness, that we were the buffoons and he was the only sensible one in the group.

As we left the chamber, Vinay and I burst out laughing, our “mission accomplished.” I couldn’t help but worry a bit, though—I knew somehow that Vinay and Dinesh, with their antics, would manage to pass the course, no problem. Meanwhile, I was just an average guy, barely managing to hover around the passing line. But then something unexpected happened.

Sure enough, as I had predicted, Vinay and Dinesh passed without any trouble. But I, in all my paranoia, didn’t even show up for the final exams! How can Dr Murthy can fail me.

Even Dr. Murthy, it seemed, dreaded the thought of having me around for another trimester. I hadn’t gone to him, asking for a chance to make up the ‘Missed Exams,’ which was a common practice in the academic cycle. He probably would have failed me, if it weren’t for a strange act of kindness on his part. Instead of letting me fail outright, he sent a message through one of my seniors, O. Girish, who was kind of like a ‘Graduate Assistant’ at the Department of Aquaculture. But I, being me, didn’t bother acknowledging the message.

Eventually, Dr. Murthy took matters into his own hands and summoned me to take the missed exam on a random Wednesday. Through Girish, I sent my own message back: “Saturday, or nothing.” In my mind, I figured that if miracles were to happen, they’d better happen on my terms. And, surprisingly enough, they did—Dr. Murthy agreed to reschedule.

When the day finally came, I sat down with a paper that had only five essay-type questions. I knew I had no choice but to pour out everything I knew, even if it wasn’t much. With a mix of sincerity and no small amount of desperation, I filled those pages with whatever came to mind. Somehow, against all odds, I passed with a “B” grade.

That whole ordeal didn’t end there. After seven years of service in the university, in 2002, I went back to the same department to pursue my post-graduate degree under Dr. C. Vasudevappa. The irony was that I ended up sticking with the same guide through my doctoral studies, too. But, as life would have it, Dr. Vasudevappa got

an exciting job offer from the National Fisheries Development Board in Hyderabad. He left the university, and I was left without a guide.

With no other option, I had to turn to none other than Dr. Murthy. When I approached him, he greeted me with his signature calm demeanour, and with a slight smirk, he said, "I hope you've changed." I just smiled back, knowing how far we had come since the days of my wild antics. He was gracious enough to let me conduct my research at the Zonal Agricultural Research Station in Mandya, where I was working.

In 2007, after years of ups and downs, I earned my doctorate. Life has a funny way of circling back—those who once doubted you can become your greatest supporters, and those you might have given trouble to can end up helping you achieve your biggest milestones. Perhaps Dr. Murthy knew something about me all along that I hadn't realized myself. Or maybe, in his quiet way, he saw potential where I only saw obstacles. Either way, I left that chapter not just with a degree but with a sense of growth and humility that carried me forward.

“The future threat to humankind is not disease or war, but hunger and the collapse of humanity's compassion. —Dr Magada”

Tide 06

The Flood Current

There was a theatre called ‘New Chitra’ on the outskirts of town, known for screening English movies, which was rare back then. It was a modest place, but for us, it might as well have been a gateway to another world. We’d trek the 7 kilometres on foot, which, for a bunch of college students with little money but plenty of time, was a regular adventure. The movies themselves? Well, those were often as puzzling as they were entertaining—at least to me. We must have seen dozens of films there, but the only one I distinctly remember comprehending was Jim Carrey’s *The Mask*. That one, with all its slapstick humour and exaggerated expressions, was the kind of thing even someone with no English fluency could follow.

The rest of the films? A blur of confusing dialogue, explosions, and dramatic monologues that flew over my head. I’d glance around at my friends, wondering if they were as lost as I was. Of course, Sanju, my roommate, always seemed to understand everything—and some friends pretended too. On our way back from the theatre, late into the night, he would patiently explain the plot, the characters, and what it all meant. The more he explained, the clearer things seemed to become... until, of course, J Umesha chimed in.

Now, J Umesha was the self-proclaimed philosopher of our group. Where Sanju would offer straightforward answers, Umesha would twist them into metaphysical riddles. A simple question like “Why did the hero shoot the villain?” would somehow turn into a discussion on the nature of good and evil, the impermanence of life, and whether any of us truly understand our purpose. By the time he

was done, I was usually more confused than when I'd started. But it was all part of the fun. The walk back from New Chitra was never boring when you have minds like Sanju, Vinay and Umesha to bounce ideas off.

Late nights were a theme in my life, not just after movie outings but in general. You see, I wasn't exactly the most studious fellow in college, but I had my methods. My nights weren't spent cramming out of sheer dedication, but rather out of strategy. I would wait for the real bookworms—the ones who spent every waking moment studying—to finally fall asleep. Once I heard their snores echoing through their room, I would sneak into their rooms and borrow their notes. I wasn't stealing; I always returned them before morning. But I knew if I waited until they were awake, there was no chance they'd willingly hand over their meticulously organized study guides to someone like me.

In the first trimester, I made the mistake of assuming that Sanju, being my roommate, would naturally help me out. After all, we were close, and we shared plenty of late-night conversations. But when I asked him to help me in an exam, he flat-out refused. "I can't help you," he said in that straightforward, no-nonsense tone of his. "You've got to figure it out on your own."

At first, I was shocked. Weren't roommates supposed to look out for each other? But as time went on, I realized that Sanju wasn't being unkind. He was just firm in his belief that I needed to stand on my own two feet. And he wasn't wrong. If I wanted to make it through this, I had to find my own way.

That's where Vinay came in. Vinay was different. Where Sanju was all discipline and tough love, Vinay was the kind of guy who would bend over backward to help a friend in need. He was also my partner-in-crime when it came to our favourite pastime: Dumb Charades. We were unbeatable, a fact that had earned us some level of popularity on campus. It wasn't just a game for us; it was a survival skill. In a way, that skill translated into our exam preparations and in the exams too.

Vinay had this uncanny ability to simplify things, whether it was academic concepts or figuring out how to act out the most ridiculous movie titles in Dumb Charades. When exams were approaching, Vinay would sit with me and go over the key points, breaking everything down into manageable chunks. He'd say, "It's just like charades, Shiv. You've just got to focus on the big picture first, then the details will follow."

Thanks to Vinay's help, and a little luck, I scraped through most of my exams that trimester. But there was a certain camaraderie that came from those late-night study sessions, the kind where we'd bounce ideas off each other while half-asleep, and somehow, it worked. There was an odd sense of security in knowing that no matter how confusing the subject, or how lost I felt, I wasn't alone in it.

One incident I remember vividly involved a particularly tough set of notes that I just couldn't get my hands on. The only person who had them was the most studious guy in our dorm was Mr M R Ramesh, and he guarded his notes like they were the holy grail. But, I was unable to read his bad handwriting. Somehow, Mr Vishwanath—a studious and genius fellow started giving his notes

Now, let me tell you, no one on campus could beat Sanu, Vinay and me at Dumb Charades. We were a well-oiled machine, communicating through gestures and expressions like a pair of mind-readers. The challenge was set, and needless to say, we wiped the floor with him. Mr Nanjundappa—one of juniors came in and whispered a word with Sanju—a Charader- the enactor. Sanju just showed his fingers and smattering his eyes to express 'Tiny,' I just took few seconds and said the right word. The word was "Pseudomonas"—a bacterium. We just took six seconds.

As the trimester progressed, my strategy of studying by night and relying on Vinay, Vishwa and others guidance started to pay off. Sanju, of course, watched all this unfold with a knowing smirk, but he never said "I told you so." He didn't need to. He knew that I was learning, in my own roundabout way, how to survive the academic jungle.

Those late-night walks to New Chitra, the philosophical debates with Umesha, the Dumb Charades challenges, and the sneaky note-borrowing missions—those were the moments that defined my college years. It wasn't just about passing exams or understanding movies; it was about navigating life in a way that made sense to me.

And in the end, I realized that maybe I wasn't as clueless as I thought. Maybe, just maybe, I had a little bit of that Mask-like ability to adapt, to figure things out, and to find my own rhythm, even if it took a few detours along the way.

After all, when you finish reading my story, you might ask, "What's the point? What's the takeaway?" The message is simple: *You need to understand yourself, just as I came to understand myself after watching the movie *The Mask*. It wasn't about wearing a literal mask like Jim Carrey's character; rather, it was about realizing that I never needed a mask to begin with. I didn't have to hide who I was, or pretend to be someone else. I lived my life on my own terms, without worrying about how others perceived me.

I was often the most misunderstood person in the college, but I never let that get to me. People labelled me with all sorts of names—some were meant as jokes, some were meant to put me down. People called 'Joker.' After watching a movie "Joker," I really felt that I was kind person with similar kind of 'Obsessive Complex or Eccentric.' But I couldn't care less. I wasn't here to please them. Friends, classmates, and even random people on campus found ways to categorize me. Some said I was dull, that I didn't understand the subjects we were studying. Others simply threw me into the 'bad boys' group, like I was some sort of rebel who didn't follow the rules. It didn't bother me because I never signed up for their approval in the first place.

In fact, the funny part is, there actually was a band called 'Bad Boys,' and it became this running joke. A copy of a magazine called *Sun*, with a picture of a band titled "Bad Boys," somehow found its way onto the wall of my room. I think it was meant to be a joke, but I took it as a sign of what I wanted for myself. While people were busy labelling me, I was dreaming of building my own band—not a

literal one, but a collective of like-minded people who understood the world the way I did. My ‘bandwidth,’ if you will, was much larger than what others could comprehend. They didn’t get me, and I didn’t expect them to.

What people failed to see was that I had a clear vision for myself. I understood my own worth. I wasn’t lost or directionless. I wasn’t failing because I didn’t know what I wanted; I was just taking a different path. My path didn’t fit into the traditional framework of what success looked like on campus, and that was fine by me. I didn’t need to fit in, because I wasn’t trying to be part of the crowd. I wasn’t seeking validation from others. I was, in every sense of the word, living life on my own terms.

What I had—and what so many people fail to grasp—is self-belief. Some might call it arrogance or self-obsession, but I see it as an essential ingredient to surviving in a world that constantly tries to mould you into something you’re not. If I don’t love myself, who else is going to? If I don’t believe in my own potential, why should anyone else? And so, I nurtured what I like to call ‘harmless ego.’ It’s not about being better than anyone else; it’s about knowing your own worth and never letting anyone else define it for you.

People love to project their insecurities onto others, don’t they? They’ll say, “You’re too full of yourself,” or “You think too highly of yourself.” But I say, what’s your problem if I love myself? Why should my confidence threaten you? Why should my self-belief be a problem for anyone but me? Loving yourself isn’t a crime. In fact, it’s the foundation of all good things in life—success, happiness, and peace.

I realized early on that waiting for approval or validation from others is a losing game. Society—whether it’s the campus crowd or the wider world—will always have opinions about you. They’ll always have labels, judgments, and criticisms. You’ll be too much of this or not enough of that. But the truth is, none of those opinions matter. What matters is what you think of yourself. If you cast your vote for yourself, you’ve already won the most important election in life.

Finally, I can see how those labels—‘bad boy,’ ‘dull,’ ‘unfit’—were never really about me. They were about other people’s discomfort with the fact that I didn’t play by their rules. I didn’t conform to their expectations. And that made them uncomfortable, because it forced them to confront their own limitations. If I could live life on my own terms, why couldn’t they? That’s what really bothered them.

In the end, the only label I care about is the one I give myself. And that label is simple: I’m someone who believes in myself, loves myself, and doesn’t need anyone’s permission to be exactly who I am. I didn’t wear a mask to fit in, to please others, or to hide my true self. I lived authentically, unapologetically, and that’s why I always say, ‘If you know me, you can’t be a pessimist.’ Because if I could find happiness, confidence, and peace by simply being myself, then anyone can.

So, go ahead and ask yourself: Who are you living for? Are you trying to fit into the labels and expectations others have placed on you? Or are you, like me, living life on your own terms? If you’re still wearing a mask, ‘maybe it’s time to take it off.’ You might be surprised at how much easier life becomes when you stop pretending and start being exactly who you are."

There comes a moment in life when you realize that being “unfit” is a matter of context, not capability. It hit me one day, as I was reflecting on the paths I’d taken and the ones I hadn’t yet explored: I was never unfit; I was only a misfit. The world around me, with its rigid definitions of success and failure, didn’t have a space that matched who I was. And that’s when I knew, the problem wasn’t with me—it was with the place I was in. The solution? I had to change the place. I had to find where I truly belonged.

Think about it this way: even a tortoise can fly. Impossible, right? But the only condition is, it has to fall from a great height. Now, to many, that sounds absurd—a tortoise, one of nature’s slowest, most grounded creatures, soaring through the air? Yet, it’s not about the inherent capability of the tortoise to fly like a bird. It’s about the situation it finds itself in. A tortoise, if it falls from the top

of a building, will experience flight—albeit briefly—before returning to the ground. There's a strange metaphor in that, one that resonates deeply with me. You get the 'Kinetic Energy'⁸ when you elevate yourself.

Sometimes, to "fly" in life, you need to leap from heights you never imagined. You need to go beyond your comfort zone, fall, and experience something new, something beyond the limits others have placed on you—or even those you've placed on yourself. It's not about conforming to the idea of what others think you should be, but about embracing the misfit within and turning that into your strength.

You see, society has this one-size-fits-all approach to success. If you don't fit into the neat little boxes they've prepared for you—academic excellence, career progression, social norms—they label you as a failure, an outsider, a misfit. But here's the thing: being a misfit isn't a bad thing. In fact, it's often the misfits who change the world, because they refuse to accept the status quo. They challenge the norms, break the rules, and create their own paths.

The tortoise, falling from that great height, is a powerful image of how life sometimes requires us to take risks, to step into the unknown, to embrace failure as a stepping stone to something greater. In the fall, there is a brief moment of flight—a glimpse of what's possible when you break free from the limitations imposed by the ground, by your surroundings, by the expectations of others. And yes, the fall might be scary. It might end in a crash. Before you take a great height, make sure that you fall on a soft ground or water or have a wings. The wings of fire as narrated by our great leader Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. If you want to fly like a rocket, you have to burn your base. But it's the leap itself that counts.

I began to see my own misfit nature not as a curse, but as a unique blessing. I wasn't unfit for life, for success, for happiness—I was simply not in the wrong environment. It was so wonderful place with great friends. Some teachers made me doubt my ability. The key

⁸ Kinetic energy is a form of energy that an object or a particle has by reason of its motion.

wasn't to change who I was to fit in, but to change where I was, to find a place where my strengths, my quirks, my misfit nature could thrive.

And that's what I want you to take from this. If you've ever felt like you don't belong, like the world doesn't have a space for you—don't despair. You're not unfit. You're just a misfit in the wrong place. And the good news is, you don't have to stay in that place. You can move. You can find where you belong. You can leap from the building and experience that moment of flight, even if it's fleeting.

It's all about perspective. The tortoise isn't supposed to fly, and yet, in the right circumstances, it does. Just like you might not fit into the roles and expectations others have for you, but in the right environment, you can soar. You might be misunderstood, overlooked, or even dismissed as someone who doesn't fit the mould. But remember, the mould is not the measure of your worth. Your worth comes from within, from your ability to see beyond the labels, the judgments, and the limitations placed upon you.

So, go ahead—go, and fall from the top. Take that leap into the unknown. Change your environment, change your perspective, and you might just find yourself soaring in ways you never imagined. The fall might be terrifying, and the landing might be rough, but that brief moment of flight is worth it. Because in that moment, you'll realize that being a misfit isn't a weakness—it's your greatest strength.

“Diamonds don't shine on their own; they only reflect the light cast upon them. Be the light—Magada”

Cyclone 01

The Last World

Somehow, I managed to crawl my way through all 12 trimesters, pushing every ounce of energy into finishing the courses. But despite my best efforts, two stubborn subjects refused to let me pass: Fishery Biochemistry and Marine Biology. It wasn't just the subject matter that weighed heavy on me; it was the crushing pressure of maintaining that elusive 2.0 CGPA. The rule was simple: if you couldn't meet the 2.0 out of 4.0, you were allowed to register for only 12 credit hours, which translated to about 3-4 subjects while others are allowed register 6-7 subjects. It was meant to ease the burden, to slow you down, but to me, it felt like punishment, as if the system was telling me I couldn't handle the same load as everyone else. It was a sharp reminder that I was falling behind.

The humiliation was real, though, when I had to re-register for those failed courses with my juniors. Imagine walking into a class full of students who looked up to you as a senior, but here you are, sitting alongside them, trying to pass what they are breezing through. It was like being thrown into a pool of younger sharks—they used to call them as 'Piranhas', and I was barely keeping afloat. Thankfully, they were close enough to me to avoid making a spectacle of it—most of the time. But still, every glance felt like a reminder of my struggle, and every interaction carried the weight of my failure.

Then came the Post Final (PF) years, a phase that carried its own brand of pain. My juniors, Biju Joseph and Suman, were good friends—close enough that they knew just where to hit me where it hurt, but smart enough to do it with a smile. They had their fun

calling me “PF,” a term that should’ve been innocent enough but felt like an open wound being poked again and again. On some days, I could take it in stride, brush it off with a laugh. But on others, the weight of their words crushed me.

It all came to a head one day after an Intestinal Oil Massage (IoM)—a booze party, leaves you physically drained, emotionally low fragile. When I was done, I cried my gut out, not just from the physical exhaustion but from the emotional toll of being constantly dragged down in the name of ‘fun’ and ‘friendship.’

I remember pleading with them, asking for just a little mercy, for the teasing to stop, but to them, it was all in good humour. They didn’t understand—or perhaps they did—that every joke, every nickname was stripping away what little dignity I had left. And yet, despite all of it, I couldn’t bring myself to hate them. They were still my best friends, even after all the pain they caused me. We had our moments too, moments of raw emotion where we cried together, shared in the mess of life we were all navigating. They knew how low I was, but instead of helping me rise, they pulled me further down. Maybe that was their way of coping, of dealing with the awkwardness of seeing their senior struggle. But in their own twisted way, they dragged me through the mud—constantly reminding me of my failures, my unfinished business.

It wasn’t just them, though. The world seemed to be in on the joke. My classmates had all moved on to their master’s degrees, their futures bright and secure, while I was still stuck in the trenches of undergrad, fighting battles they had long since won. It was a constant reminder of where I wasn’t, a dark cloud hanging over every step I took.

Yet, it was during those moments of intense humiliation and self-doubt that something strange happened. Instead of breaking, I began to rebuild myself, piece by piece. Those very insults, those moments of shame, became the fuel that ignited a fire inside me. I started to think big. I realized that if I couldn’t break out of the place I was in, I had to carve out a new space for myself. I began to visualize my own statue—something grand, something unbreakable. A version of

myself that would stand tall, untarnished by the mockery and the setbacks. A statue that would never crack, never fade, no matter how hard the world tried to pull me down.

I look back now and realize that it wasn't just Biju and Suman who pushed me to this point. Life, in all its brutal honesty, had its way of shaping me. I was at my lowest, facing what felt like insurmountable odds. But it was in that very pit of despair that I found my strength. You see, I wasn't unfit for this journey. I was a misfit, yes, but not unfit. I just didn't belong in the space I was trying to occupy. And so, earlier, I was trying to find out my fit place; but, I realized that I have to 'Fit' here where I live. Instead of looking for new place, I decided that I fit in this profession and prove the world and I started to break the extra stones and dust to fit into my own profession.

As much as the pain of those years still stings, I'm thankful for it. It was those humiliations, those "PF" jokes, those dark nights where I felt utterly alone, that forced me to dig deeper, to look beyond the surface and discover the resilience I didn't know I had. I began to understand that it wasn't about winning the approval of others, or keeping up with my classmates. It was about believing in myself, even when no one else did. It was about carving out my own path, even if it meant walking it alone for a while.

So yes, I was a 'PF,' and I stumbled and faltered more times than I care to remember. But those setbacks didn't shape my limits—they became the very tools that carved out my true self. Each failure was like a chisel, carefully refining me, helping me align with my path, my purpose, and ultimately my profession. Now, when I look back, I'm not just grateful to Biju and Suman for those experiences—I've redefined 'PF.' It no longer stands for what it once did. Today, it means 'Perfect Fit,' a testament to how I've come into my own.

"A- grade for Rs. 20,000"

I had this grand idea—I'd clear the 'Non-load' exam right in the first trimester. That was the term we used for supplementary exams, and I figured I'd only lose three months and be back on track, ready to join some company. Even though I was the infamous 'PF,' I still

had the guts to attend campus interviews from companies like MAC, ITC, and others.

During one interview, the recruiter asked me why my CGPA was so low. Without skipping a beat, I replied, "It's self-explanatory." I mean, come on—who says they wanted to score low? Of course, they didn't pick me. Worse, they went back to the coordinator and said I was arrogant. The coordinator pulled me aside for a little interrogation. I just told him, "I wasn't being arrogant, just honest. What's wrong with being straight in your opinion?"

Then came the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC) interview. One of the interviewers asked, "If you get another offer, will you leave us?" I didn't even hesitate. "Yes," I said, and then asked, "Wouldn't you do the same if you got a better offer?" The look on their faces was priceless! Needless to say, they didn't hire me either.

Even during my post-final (PF) year, while I was trying to figure out the pulse of the industry, it felt like some of the teachers were busy trying to stop my pulse! It was like a game—me versus the world, or at least the interviewers and some of the faculty. And yet, there I was, bouncing between interviews and exams, somehow managing to find humour in the absurdity of it all.

Every day, we craved stories—little morsels of drama and humour to chew on during our daily ritual of IoM (Intestinal Oil Massage). Back then, we didn't have the constant distractions of mobile phones or computers to entertain us. And maybe, just maybe, that was our greatest advantage. Without technology constantly feeding us information, we learned to nourish ourselves with something far richer—our own wild imaginations.

Imagination, you see, can be a portal to endless possibilities. When you're free from the bombardment of notifications and screens, you can make life whatever you want it to be. We weren't tied down by reality; instead, we let our minds roam. Sometimes, life feels more vibrant, more expansive when you're living it inside your head. There's a kind of freedom in it—when the only limit is the horizon of your thoughts.

We would sit there, coming up with outrageous scenarios, indulging in fantasies of who we could become and what the world could be. Sometimes life felt grander in our imaginations than it ever could in reality—but that was fine by us. In a way, our imagination became a shield, a way to soften the rough edges of the real world and polish them with humour, wit, and a touch of absurdity.

And perhaps, in that sense, we were richer than those glued to their devices now. We didn't need the constant drip of digital content to feel entertained; we were our own storytellers, dreamers, and philosophers. We weren't consuming the world—we were creating it, one wild, fanciful story at a time. In that imagined world, life felt limitless, vibrant, and utterly, fantastically ours to mould. It was in those moments that we truly explored the beauty of life, not bound by what was real, but by what we could imagine.

One day, I decided it was time to confront Dr. L. N. Srikar—the legendary Head of the Department of Biochemistry. He was a tall man, with a broad frame, an intimidating presence, and a reputation that echoed in the university. My friends swore by his vast knowledge of the subject, but they were just as quick to warn me of his sarcastic tone, stern attitude and clear favouritism toward women, while men seemed to get the brunt of his wrath. I approached his chamber cautiously, feeling my pulse quicken as I caught sight of him. He was sitting at his desk, deep in thought, and didn't even bother to acknowledge my presence. After standing awkwardly for what felt like an eternity, I finally gathered enough courage to walk inside.

"*Enri*—What, man?" His voice boomed, eyes scanning me from top to bottom.

"Sir... about the exam..." I began hesitantly.

"Talk fully and completely." He cut me off, gesturing impatiently.

This was a classic move. He knew exactly why I was there, yet made me squirm, forcing me to state the obvious. I laid out my case, explaining that I needed to take the exam sooner rather than later. According to him, the exam for the course was only offered in the

third trimester, which meant I'd be wasting an entire year if I had to wait. I pleaded for some flexibility, but he shut me down coldly.

"I will never give the exam early." His words struck like ice.

Dr. Srikar's reputation as an immovable force was well-known across campus. Even the "Director of Instructions" was wary of crossing him. He was tough, and nobody dared to challenge his authority. But I wasn't ready to give up just yet. My mind started racing, plotting a new strategy.

A few weeks later, I found myself helping a junior's parent navigate the campus. While walking him to the hostel, an idea began to form in my head. What if... What if I convinced this parent to act as my father and plead my case to Dr. Srikar? It was a ridiculous plan, but desperate times called for desperate measures. To my surprise, the parent agreed, and we rehearsed our roles. He was a natural actor—calm, composed, and convincing.

The day came, and we entered Dr. Srikar's office together. For a moment, I thought my plan might actually work. Dr. Srikar greeted my "father" politely and even started chatting with him about agro-ecology, rainfall patterns, and God knows what else. Meanwhile, I sat there, my patience running thin as they talked about everything except my exam.

Finally, the conversation shifted back to the topic at hand. Dr. Srikar pulled out the ledger and showed my "Drama Dad" my abysmal internal marks. I had scored a grand total of 2.0 out of 10 in practical. It was a shocking realization. That's when I remembered Mr. Srinivas—the Assistant Professor of Biochemistry. He was a contemporary of Dr. Srikar but had never been promoted, and as a result, he harboured a deep resentment for... well, pretty much everyone. I had been bold enough to ask questions in his class, and in return, he had cut my marks ruthlessly. He once even told me, "You won't pass this subject in your lifetime."

As my "Drama Dad" and Dr. Srikar concluded their discussion, I was left with no choice but to accept his decision. All my tactics had failed. Dejected, I waited another month, biding my time as I cooked up another plan.

This time, I decided to try a different approach. Armed with a new story, I marched back into Dr. Srikar's office. I told him I had already secured a job through the campus interview drive, hoping this would sway his decision. His interest piqued.

"Job?" He asked, finally looking up from his papers. "What's the salary?"

"Rs. 5000 per month, sir," I replied confidently.

He took his time reacting, still absorbed in whatever he was reading. After what felt like an eternity, he finally spoke.

"Give me Rs. 20,000, and I'll give you an 'A' grade."

I was stunned. Was he serious? I quickly started doing mental math. After a few seconds, I came to what I thought was a brilliant conclusion.

"Sir, how about I give you Rs. 5000 and you give me a 'D' grade?" I said, genuinely thinking I had cracked the perfect deal.

What happened next left me completely blindsided. Dr. Srikar erupted into a fury, his voice booming as he berated me for the next 40 minutes straight. I was utterly confused. After all, it was his offer! I was just trying to be practical.

"Do you want to bribe me?" He yelled.

"Sir, it was your—" I started to explain, but he cut me off again.

"Get lost!" He bellowed, before summoning Mazid, the lab assistant, to usher me out.

I left his office that day with a heavy heart, my mind swirling with a mix of confusion, frustration, and disbelief. All my efforts, all my schemes—none of them worked. Dr. Srikar had bested me once again, and this time, I didn't even know how to react.

I did not have sufficient money to stay in the hostel. Somehow, I managed till the third trimester and convinced both Dr Katti and Dr Srikar to give the respective exams and got D-grade in both the exams. In order to save time and money, I asked Dr Srikar to submit my grades immediately after my exams. He said, he will submit the

grade only after fifteen upon completion of the third trimester and he stuck to his words unlike Dr Katti who submitted the grades at the earliest and said that I will go a long way and win in the life.

My mess bill piled up and I had to pay Rs. 1780/- to clear all my dues. Somehow, I managed to get the money. My parents borrowed money from someone and sent it to me.

The Burette and Pipette

I was finally ready to leave campus. Everything was in place, my mind set on moving on from the years of drama, struggle, and memories. I just had one last formality: the dreaded "No Objection Certificate" (NOC). The academic unit handed me the form and informed me that I needed to get it signed by all the departments before I could officially leave. Easy enough, I thought. So, I began the process, moving swiftly through each department, collecting signatures like I was on a victory lap—until I hit a roadblock at the Department of Biochemistry.

There, looming over my final exit, was none other than Dr. L.N. Srikar, the same formidable figure who had haunted my academic life for so long. He glanced at me and called out for Mazid, the lab assistant. Mazid appeared, carrying a large ledger, and without much ceremony, they informed me that I had two outstanding fines.

"Fines?" I asked, genuinely baffled.

Dr. Srikar's eyes gleamed as he told me I had broken a burette and a pipette in the lab. Two fines. I stood there, shocked. I had never even touched those delicate glass instruments! In fact, I prided myself on staying as far away from them as possible—alien, fragile things they were.

I quickly rewound the mental tape of every single day spent in that Biochemistry lab. Maybe one day Vinay had casually called me over, asking me to sign something. I remember feeling proud as I signed, thinking it was some official document. How naive I had been! It must've been some sneaky way of pinning those broken glassware fines on me.

I had only Rs. 280 left in my pocket, and replacing those pieces was going to cost way more. Burettes cost Rs. 480 and pipettes Rs. 160 each. I was already sweating, doing quick math in my head. Mazid told me to replace the broken equipment, suggesting I buy them from Durga Laboratory, the only store in Mangalore that sold lab instruments back in those days.

I nodded and left the lab, but not to rush to the store. I had a different plan. The clock read 12:45 pm, and I knew from experience that Dr. Srikar and Mazid took lunch around 1 pm. I wandered around until 1:05, and as soon as they left for their break, I made my move like a man on a mission.

Channelling my inner fugitive, I sneaked back into the lab. My heart was racing as I entered the equipment storage area, eyes darting around to make sure no one was watching. I spotted a stash of burettes and pipettes—exactly what I needed! Carefully, I grabbed one burette and one pipette, went straight to the hostel, washed them thoroughly (making sure they sparkled as new), and then wrapped them up in a newspaper just like I'd seen the other glassware wrapped in the store.

Feeling like a master of stealth, I waited until 3:45 pm to make my triumphant return to the lab. I didn't want to show up too early and raise suspicion. As I walked in, pretending to look exhausted from a long journey to and from the city, I handed over the "new" glassware with a straight face.

"Here are the replacements," I said, holding back a grin.

Mazid inspected the items, nodded approvingly, and handed me my "No Dues" certificate. It took everything in me not to burst out laughing at the sheer absurdity of it all. I had managed to beat the system in my own small, ridiculous way. With the certificate in hand, I walked out of that department for the last time, feeling lighter than ever.

The relief washed over me as I left. I wasn't just walking away with a NOC—I was walking away with the satisfaction of knowing that, despite everything, I had outsmarted the famous Dr. Srikar and his bureaucratic maze, even if only for a brief moment.

Though I had spent some of the happiest times of my life on that campus, living fully in the moment, my final trimester was a different story. Restlessness had crept in, and the joy I once felt seemed to slip through my fingers. As the day of my departure arrived, I felt a strange mixture of sadness and relief. Surprisingly, around 60 to 80 friends showed up at the gate to see me off, a small army of well-wishers for what should've been a triumphant farewell.

Before leaving, I pulled aside one of my juniors and asked him to sneak out three coconuts from the hostel stores. In our tradition, breaking coconuts symbolizes victory and celebration, and I wasn't about to leave without a little ritual of my own. The first coconut was shattered in front of the mess—a small nod to the countless meals and memories shared there. The second one was broken near the alumni building circle, a tribute to the journeys of everyone who had come before me and those who would follow. And finally, the third coconut—perhaps the most meaningful of all—was smashed at the college's main gate, marking my passage out of the place that had been both a playground and a battlefield for me.

Had Dr. Reddy been the warden, I'm sure he would've fined me, accusing me of sneaking out a "truckload of coconuts," as he did with everything else. But thankfully, I escaped that! And so, with my final act of rebellion and celebration complete, I left Mangalore keeping my heart in the campus itself. Anything forgotten on campus can be replaced or bought anew, but what I left behind was far more than just a possession—it was my very heart. I surrendered it to the spirit of the place, hoping that destiny itself would weave its threads in such a way that life would one day guide me back to where I truly belonged.

“A Ship in harbour is safe; But that is not what ships are built for— John A. Shedd”

Monsoon 01

The South India Tour

The knock on the door startled me. I wasn't expecting anyone, and my mind raced with possibilities. When I opened it, standing in front of me was none other than Riaz Ahmed, grinning from ear to ear, his bags in tow. I couldn't believe it. He had taken my autograph once, and I vaguely remembered giving him my address, but never in a million years did I think he'd show up at my doorstep, unannounced and uninvited.

Without missing a beat, Riaz, in his ever-confident manner, explained that he was on a mission to search for a job, and without bothering to ask, he had decided to team up with me. Just like that. He was joining me on this adventure. He wasn't alone in his confidence either; with his smooth-talking, he managed to convince my parents that the two of us would hit the road and explore job opportunities anywhere along the East Coast. While my parents were visibly worried, his calm assurances seemed to work like magic. He had that kind of influence on people.

As I stood there, caught between surprise and uncertainty, my mother, in her quiet, protective way, took matters into her own hands. She didn't say much, but she disappeared for a moment and returned with a few thousand rupees—money she had secretly acquired by pledging her gold. It wasn't much, but it was everything to us. The weight of her sacrifice hit me hard, and for a second, I thought about calling the whole thing off.

But the decision was made. The bags were packed, and with heavy hearts, we cried and said our goodbyes. Both of us knelt before my parents, touching their feet in the traditional gesture of seeking

blessings. My mother, with tears in her eyes, hugged me tightly, while my father's firm look was all the silent encouragement I needed.

And just like that, we left. Two wide-eyed dreamers, with a few thousand rupees in our pockets and nothing but the road ahead. We called it our "South India Tour," but deep down, we both knew it was so much more—a leap into the unknown, into a world where anything could happen.

Bay of Bengal: Rise in the East

We both headed straight for Madras, full of hope, but our optimism quickly faded. The city welcomed us with little more than a rundown hotel, the kind of place that wears its weariness on its walls. Desperate to find our footing, we scoured through visiting cards, dug up references, and started cold-calling companies, but their responses were as icy as dead fish. Each conversation drained a little more of our spirit, leaving us hollow with rejection. Then came the call that, for a brief moment, sparked hope—an MBA graduate invited us for interviews at SS Technologies on Anna Road, Chennai.

But what awaited us was nothing short of humiliation. This man, not even a biologist, tore into us with sadistic pleasure, using our own words as ammunition. He grilled us with questions that sliced through our confidence, as if his only goal was to make sure we knew how little we understood. And he succeeded. We didn't need him to tell us we were ignorant of the technology—our own silence was enough. We tried to salvage some dignity, saying we were willing to learn, but he roared back, "This is not a training institute!" His words rang in our ears long after we left the room, shattered and stripped of any ambition. He treated us like guinea pigs in his personal experiment, testing every interview tactic on us until we were utterly drained, contemplating the long journey home.

The next day, Riaz managed to unearth some information about MAC Shrimp Hatcheries in Polem, near Mahabalipuram. With nothing left to lose, we went there. Our classmate, Naveen Kumar, welcomed us with open arms, feeding us hearty meals that seemed to bring our spirits back to life, if only for a while. He gave us a tour of

the hatchery, a place unlike anything we had ever seen—intricate designs and structures we had never imagined existed. But even in this brief moment of respite, we were reminded of our insignificance. We met two seniors, Saju Abraham and Ravi Kiran, who barely acknowledged our presence, too wrapped up in their own self-importance, as if they were on the verge of inventing shrimp itself.

Despite the hospitality, MAC Shrimp Hatcheries wasn't ready to recruit us without following proper procedures. And so, our journey continued, with no clear destination in sight. We found ourselves in Mayiladuthurai, where Laxminarayan Pai and Ms. Renuka were working. It was there we finally felt a bit of warmth. Pai took good care of us, and for a brief moment, we allowed ourselves to laugh again, eating breakfast in some shabby roadside hotel. But even that brief escape was interrupted when a local, unprovoked, picked a fight with us. We were so worn out, so disillusioned, that we couldn't even muster the energy to defend ourselves.

From there, we visited SS Aquaculture Farm once more and interviewed with yet another company in the same town. Nothing worked. The doors that seemed to hold our future stayed firmly shut, one after another. Defeated, drained of any hope or energy, we made our way to Vizag, unsure of what lay ahead but knowing we had to keep moving, even if the path was shrouded in uncertainty.

Ganapathy Shetty and UB Groups

We arrived in Vizag, weary but hopeful, and were soon welcomed by an unexpected brotherhood. Siddalingeshwar Eli, Vedamurthy, and Ganapathy Shetty were all there, each one entrenched in different corners of the seafood processing industry. Eli had a solid footing with VB Groups, while Shetty held his own at United Beverages Group. Together, they had carved out a life in the city's most exclusive spot—the RK Duplex, right on Marine Drive, with balconies that gazed directly out over the endless, glittering sea.

The duplex became our sanctuary, our fortress of camaraderie. Every day felt like a festival. Eli, true to his connections, would bring home jumbo prawns, fresh from the day's catch. The aroma of rich, coastal recipes filled the air as the cook prepared meals fit for kings.

Meanwhile, Shetty, always the lively soul, would show up with every kind of whisky and beer you could imagine, turning our nights into celebrations, even when there wasn't much to celebrate. We were bachelors, and our entry into their lives seemed to breathe new life into the quiet routine they had grown used to. The nights were long and filled with laughter, the sea crashing in the background, as we revelled in this temporary escape from our struggles.

Riaz, though, was different. Always a bit aloof, he kept to himself, distant from the easy joy that the rest of us shared. We attended a few interviews in Vizag, but the offers were discouraging—meagre salaries that barely justified the effort. Shetty, ever the protective brother, outright refused to let us settle for such meagre pay. He made sure we didn't spend a single paisa, taking care of everything while our savings quietly drained away. Then, without warning, Riaz left Vizag—no job, no goodbye—just gone. It stung, but life moved forward.

Shetty, on the other hand, wasn't ready to let me go. He insisted I stay with him for a few more months, and I did, even though I had nothing to occupy my days. I spent the time in a strange limbo, filling our nights with songs—Bhavageethe, ghazals, and folk tunes—pouring out my soul into every note. Even Shetty, this tough guy who always carried a hard exterior, would break down in tears some nights, overcome by the emotion that music stirs up in the quiet hours. Our bond deepened with every shared moment, with every meal, with every tear.

I started watching movies in Geetanjali theatre. I never missed the movies of a great comedian Brahmadandam. I saw movies of Dr Rajendra Prasad and other off beat movies to learn Telugu and became fluent within few days. Everyday evening before these guys come, I used to go to the marine drive area and started walking. I made many good friends over there.

Then came a twist of fate. Mr. Ganta Srinivas Raju, a politician of rising stature, along with Mr. Raja Rao, was planning to establish a shrimp hatchery in Ongole, some 700 kilo meters from Vizag. Word reached me that Mr. Raju was interested in interviewing me

for the project. When the interview happened, it felt surreal—this was the break I had been waiting for, and I nailed it. Soon, I had an appointment in hand, and I was over the moon with joy. But for Shetty, Eli, and Veda, this wasn't a moment of celebration—it was bittersweet. They didn't want to see me go, didn't want to lose the bond we had formed.

On the day of my departure, they took me on a shopping spree through the city, refusing to let me leave without equipping me with everything I could need. Branded clothes, a new cap, chappals, even a Walkman to drown out the lonely moments that lay ahead. They loaded me up with gifts, a reflection of their affection, as if the material things could hold our friendship together across the distance.

The train was scheduled for 11:30 pm, and the platform was heavy with emotion. They all came to see me off, standing in a small cluster by the tracks, their faces reflecting a mixture of sadness and pride. When the train finally pulled away, I couldn't hold back the tears. I cried quietly in my compartment, my heart heavy with the weight of leaving behind the only real connection I had felt in months.

As I settled into my seat and opened the bag they had so lovingly packed, I discovered a bundle of notes—Rs. 10,000, tucked away without a word. It was a fortune, worth a few lakhs in today's money. Shetty had secretly placed it there, a silent gesture of love and protection. That was the kind of bond we had created—a bond built on loyalty, on shared hardship, and on an unspoken promise to always look out for one another, no matter how far apart life took us. Life has a curious way of weaving irony into its fabric, often turning adversaries into allies and challengers into guides. The man who once ragged me mercilessly at the hostel, who seemed to take pleasure in my discomfort, became the very person who would eventually save me. In the beginning, he embodied everything I resented—a force of humiliation, stripping away my confidence, exposing my vulnerabilities in front of others. At that time, he was the villain in the story I told myself, the source of all my frustration and anxiety.

But life, unpredictable and mysterious, often reveals that those who push us into the fire are also the ones preparing us for it. With time, I came to realize that beneath the cruelty, there was a certain twisted wisdom in his actions, an unspoken understanding of the trials we would eventually face beyond the walls of that hostel. His harshness wasn't just about breaking me down—it was about making me stronger, forcing me to confront the insecurities I didn't want to face, shaping me in ways I couldn't appreciate at the time.

When life threw its real challenges at me—when I found myself at the edge of despair, unsure of where to turn—it was this very man who extended his hand, pulling me back from the abyss. The one who had once torn me apart was now the one piecing me back together. It was as if the universe had conspired to teach me that those we perceive as our enemies can often be the ones who understand us the most, not because they've nurtured us gently, but because they've tested our limits and revealed our true strengths.

In retrospect, I realize that saviours don't always come dressed as saints. Sometimes, they come as the very people who challenge us the hardest, who force us to grow in ways that we resist, because they see something in us that we're not ready to see ourselves. The man who once humiliated me taught me a valuable lesson: in the grand scheme of life, the roles of villain and hero are not fixed. They shift, blur, and sometimes, the one who breaks you down is also the one who builds you back up.

Years passed, and life carried us along its winding paths, but the memory of Shetty's generosity lingered in my mind. When we met again after a long gap, I half-jokingly told him that I would never return the money he had given me that day at the train station. I expected some light banter in return, maybe a playful reminder of the debt I still carried. But instead, Shetty, with a calmness that only deep wisdom brings, responded, "No problem, help others who are in need; of course, that was all I wanted to say."

In that moment, I realized something profound. The gesture of giving wasn't just an act of charity; it was a chain—a cycle of kindness, an unspoken covenant that we pass forward rather than hold onto. Shetty had never expected repayment in the literal sense.

His gift wasn't meant to be a debt to repay, but rather a seed to plant, to nurture, and to let grow in the soil of generosity. His words revealed a philosophy as old as time itself: true wealth is not in what we accumulate for ourselves, but in what we give away freely, knowing it will flow to those who need it.

From that day on, I lived with a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Shetty didn't just give me money—he entrusted me with a responsibility, a quiet mission to help others as he had helped me. It was a torch passed from one hand to another, illuminating a path of empathy, compassion, and service. And in that light, I found a greater purpose.

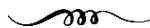
I never returned that money, not because I didn't want to, but because the debt had transformed. It wasn't about repaying Shetty; it was about continuing the cycle he had initiated. The more I gave to others, the more I realized how this philosophy worked like the waves of the ocean—what you send out eventually returns in unexpected ways, often far greater than you ever imagined.

Helping others became not just an act of kindness, but a way of honouring the bond between us, a tribute to the selflessness that had saved me when I needed it most. And it didn't end—it continued, rippling outwards, touching lives, inspiring others to do the same. Each person I helped was not just a recipient, but another link in a chain of human connection that stretched back to that moment with Shetty and beyond.

In Shetty's simple words—"help others who are in need"—was the essence of a timeless truth: we are all caretakers of one another. Our individual lives are interwoven into the larger fabric of humanity, and the greatest gift we can give is not wealth or material possessions, but the love, support, and compassion that flow through us. This cycle of giving has no beginning and no end—it is infinite, as long as we keep it alive.

And so, I never returned the money. Instead, I passed it on, not in currency but in care, ensuring that Shetty's gift—and the wisdom behind it—lives on in every act of kindness I continue to offer like him.

“Love is Unconditional. One must love without any ‘Expectations’ and ‘Conditions’—Magada”



Monsoon 02

The Bay of Bengal

After leaving Vizag, I embarked on an unexpected journey to Tangatur, a small, unassuming town near Nellore and Ongole in Andhra Pradesh, India. With no phone in hand and no clear directions, I found myself relying on the kindness of strangers—the auto driver, the hotel owner, anyone who might point me in the right direction. After what felt like an eternity of uncertainty, I finally stumbled upon the sub-office of ‘Prathyusha Shrimp Hatchery,’ it was just rice mill, where I was greeted by Mr. Sudhakar Rao and Mr. Prabhakar Reddy, both relatives of the shrimp business promoter, Mr. Ganta Srinivas Rao. Their presence, however, provided little comfort. They were as bewildered as I was, merely going through the motions of what was expected without understanding the intricacies of the hatchery.

I was then directed to stay in a desolate, abandoned house, and the moment I stepped inside, I knew I was in for a miserable night. The air was thick with dust, and mosquitoes swarmed around me like a relentless army. Despite my exhaustion, sleep was a distant dream. The constant stinging bites were unbearable, and at one point, I was on the verge of tears, feeling utterly defeated by the night.

When dawn broke, salvation came in the form of a man on a tractor, who ordered me to join him. With little choice, I climbed aboard, and we set off toward the site—a gruelling 12-kilometer journey that took us across Ethamukkala Mandal to Rajupalem. The

barren landscape stretched endlessly before me, and when we finally arrived at the hatchery site along the 'Bay of Bengal,' it was nothing but an empty wasteland. The sun beat down mercilessly, the temperature soaring to a brutal 46 degrees, and the only sign of life was a diploma engineer named Mr. Subba Rao and a clerk, Mr. Chinchu Ramaiah, who sat idly in a small shed. The work had not even begun. They, too, were waiting—waiting for the arrival of two consultants, the renowned Dr. Bapi Biswas, an aquaculture engineer from IIT-Kharagpur, and Dr. Subba Rao, a brilliant doctorate from Andhra University. Both were celebrated for their creativity and competence, but without them, nothing could move forward.

That evening, I found myself wandering down to the shore, where the vast Bay of Bengal stretched endlessly before me. The sound of the waves crashing against the shore was deafening, yet somehow, I felt a strange silence settle within me. I sat down on a weathered catamaran, facing the roaring sea, and for a moment, it was as if time had stopped. The sky was a deep indigo, the horizon barely visible in the dimming light. Around me, fishermen moved about in their small, thatched houses, simple homes made of straw and palm leaves. These were true fishing tribes, people whose lives were as intertwined with the sea as the tides themselves. They noticed me—sitting alone, still as a statue—and curiosity sparked in their eyes.

Several of them approached, their faces weathered from years spent battling the ocean's waves. They didn't understand why I was there, sitting in silence. A few of them even asked if I was from Sri Lanka or Tamil Nadu, bewildered by my quiet presence. But I couldn't bring myself to respond. I just smiled faintly, a smile that never quite reached my eyes, as the weight of my solitude pressed down on me. Inside, my heart felt as heavy as the sea before me. I thought of home—my parents, my brothers, my friends. The distance between us suddenly felt unbearable. Without warning, the emotions I had been holding back overwhelmed me, and I wept. The tears came in a flood, as unstoppable as the waves crashing at my feet. I cried until it felt like my very soul was pouring out, all the loneliness, the exhaustion, the longing for the familiar.

By the time the tears finally subsided, night had fallen, and with it came a suffocating darkness. The village behind me had disappeared into the black void, and I was left alone on the beach, unable to make out the path I had come by. The sand, now cool underfoot, seemed to stretch on forever, and the shrubs around me cast eerie shadows in the dim light. I was unfamiliar with the land, and the route back to the village felt like a distant, imaginary memory. There was no moon to guide me, just the faint glow of lights flickering in the distance—small, fragile beacons from Rajupalem village. With no choice but to trust my instincts, I began to walk, my feet sinking into the soft sand with every step. I kept my eyes fixed on the distant lights, willing them to pull me back from the edge of despair as I walked alone through the inky darkness, my only companions the whispers of the wind and the endless sound of the sea.

I settled into an outhouse within a local landlord's bungalow, and despite the rough conditions, I was met with unexpected warmth. The elderly couple who owned the place were gentle souls, humble yet regal in their appearance, and they treated me with a kindness that felt like a lifeline. They cared for me as though I were family, and slowly, the loneliness of this remote town began to fade. Every day, I found solace in a small canteen, where I would have my tiffin, and soon enough, the villagers took notice of me. Perhaps it was my style, or perhaps it was the way I spoke, but before long, I had made many friends. The once-foreign faces now greeted me with smiles, and every other day, a different family would bring me local delicacies, welcoming me into their homes as one of their own.

What had begun as a harsh, unforgiving journey now felt like a chapter out of some grand adventure, full of unexpected friendships and quiet moments of resilience amidst the chaos.

Dr. Bapi Biswas and Dr. Subba Rao arrived from Vizag, and their presence was nothing short of striking. Dr. Bapi, always dressed in his signature attire—shorts, sturdy shoes, and a cap—carried an air of casual authority. Dr. Subba Rao, equally impressive, sported a neat pair of jeans, a tee-shirt, and of course, a cap. But what stood out the most was their constant companion: a book and a pen. It seemed they

never stepped foot on the site without these tools of knowledge in hand, always prepared to document, design, and instruct.

Whenever they spoke, we knew it was time to listen. Their words were not just conversation but instructions to be carefully noted down. The moment they started talking, we were expected to take meticulous notes, and later, it was our task to paraphrase and digest their words into actionable steps. Dr. Bapi had a knack for delivering precise work plans, always accompanied by a clear timeframe, leaving no room for ambiguity. Both of them were deeply technical, and their expertise shone through in every interaction. I began to closely observe their every move—the way they navigated complex problems, their rapid decision-making, their ability to create cost-effective designs that blended practicality with innovation. They were like walking blueprints, solving issues as they arose, with an innate ability to simplify the most challenging tasks.

Soon, I found myself working alongside Diploma Subba Rao as we embarked on the civil works. This was a new realm for me, but under their guidance, I quickly picked up valuable skills. I learned the intricacies of surveying, the importance of establishing a Temporary Bench Mark (TBM), and how to use the dumpy level with precision. My first major task was being part of the road construction, and it was here that the real labour began. We built roads using casuarina branches as a foundation, layering boulders on top of the branches, followed by 40mm stone, and then packing it all down with gravel. It was a rough, manual process, but it was fascinating to see the transformation of barren land into functional infrastructure.

The scale of the work was massive—under the relentless heat of the sun, over 100 workers toiled side by side, sweating in the scorching 46-degree temperature. Despite the gruelling conditions, the pace never slowed, and the sense of progress was palpable. What had once seemed an insurmountable task was now a collaborative effort, driven by the leadership and technical brilliance of Dr. Bapi and Dr. Subba Rao, and I was steadily becoming a part of it all.

Working alongside Diploma Subba Rao was an education in itself. Under his guidance, I immersed myself in the construction of various structures—hatchery sheds, reservoirs, larval sheds, dormitories. It was no ordinary job; every detail mattered. The hatchery was taking shape slowly but surely, and with each passing day, I felt my confidence growing. But the real test came when the promoters brought in a shipment of pipelines worth 15 lakhs from Finolex Company, essential for the water system that would power the entire operation.

The plumbers demanded an outrageous fee—15% of the pipe cost—for the plumbing work. It was absurd, an enormous sum that seemed impossible to justify for labour alone. I could feel the weight of the decision bearing down on me. The budget was already stretched thin, and such an expense would cause a serious strain. That's when a bold idea took root in my mind. Why not do the job ourselves? I turned to the local fishermen, men who were no strangers to hard, precise work. With their help, I would take on the challenge of laying the intricate network of pipes.

This was no simple task, however. It wasn't just about placing pipes in the ground; it was about building a system that would last. We needed to lay three distinct pipelines, each serving a critical function: one for air, one for freshwater, and the other for marine water. Each line had to meet strict standards, ensuring that water levels were perfectly balanced to avoid contamination or failure. One mistake could set the entire project back. The complexity of the job was daunting, and even I had my moments of doubt. But there was no turning back.

We worked tirelessly, often under the scorching sun, day after day. The fishermen, though not professional plumbers, threw themselves into the task with dedication. I supervised every detail, ensuring the pipes were laid with precision. We faced countless challenges—unpredictable weather, tricky measurements, materials that seemed to fight us every step of the way. But we persisted. I wasn't going to let anything derail this effort. Slowly but surely, the work began to take shape, and with each completed section, my confidence grew.

When the task was finally done, I stood back and looked at what we had accomplished. The system was flawless. Every pipe was in place, the levels were perfect, and the entire network ran as smoothly as if it had been installed by professionals. The day the promoters arrived to inspect the work, I could see the scepticism in their eyes. They had expected delays, mistakes, maybe even failure. But when they saw what we had done, they were utterly shocked. They couldn't believe it. What they had thought impossible, what they had anticipated would require high-priced labour and meticulous oversight, had been achieved with nothing more than determination, careful planning, and the hard work of local hands.

I had taken a risk, and it had paid off. Not only had we saved a fortune in labour costs, but we had also completed the project to a standard that exceeded their expectations. It was a moment of triumph, a validation of everything I had learned, not just from Subba Rao but from the entire experience. I had proven to myself and everyone else that with enough grit and ingenuity, even the most daunting challenges could be overcome.

Looking at my work commitment, I was given a good room in the dormitory. We brought two air conditioners for the algal laboratory. One for the lab and another as spare. Using my closeness with consultants, I fixed it to my room. Many local management were unhappy for me using the AC.

The first monsoon in the East Coast

Even in Andhra Pradesh, a summer must end. The temperature went up to 48 degrees. The North East monsoon started. All were very happy. We planted all coconut plants and teak plants along the border. The wind speed was so heavy that even the wet sand used rise for few feet's and the buckets and mug flown away like a kite. Sometimes, the farm workers used to hold the palm trees and stand to manage the wind speed. I just asked for the rain coat from the management. The next day, they brought the duck back shoes and a rain coat. I asked "What about my labours". There were 40+ workers. I insisted them bring rain coat for them also. The next day Mr Raja Rao—one of the promoters of Prathyusha Hatchery came

straight to me and said “You are not a student leader here, Don’t be smart. Just do your work.” I never spoke anything. Simply, I returned my gum boots and the rain coat.

The matter was discussed at the management level and they were helpless, because I was going strong with love and support of the workers. I brought them chess board, carrom, volley ball and a cricket set. I started playing with them every day. It was totally a new kind of atmosphere was created. With no further demands, the management gave the rain coats to all the workers; but local leaders Mr Prabhakar Reddy and team used their mind and brought the local ones. Since, I was the beggar, I had no option except keeping quiet.

Every day, workers used to come at 9.0 am and promptly at 10.45 am they used to go for a tea/biological break. There was no tea stall. Some used to go to their sheds and come back after 30-45 min. The performance was affected significantly. In fact, some used to go for urinals in the open field and relax under the shed for some time. There was no tea or coffee at all. So, I demanded the management to provide the tea twice a day. And I promised the management that I get the more quantifiable work. This time Mr Raja Rad decided to remove from the post. But, the Bapi Biswas a MBA guy understood my strategy and convinced the management to provide the tea. In fact, workers started loving their work and delivered a good work within short period of time.

The Rama Rao-The Manager

They appointed Mr. Rama Rao as the manager—a BCom graduate who, quite frankly, was as useful as a decorative flowerpot. His only real talent seemed to be praying to his beloved ‘Sai Baba’—and I mean 24/7, nonstop devotion. No matter what was happening around him, you could count on Mr. Rama Rao being in some corner, hands folded, chanting or meditating, calling on Sai Baba for divine intervention in pretty much everything.

One day, Rama Rao fell seriously ill with a nasty case of diarrhoea. When I went to visit him in the hospital, lying there pale and weak, I asked how he was holding up. With utter conviction, he told me that Sai Baba had come to him in his dreams, touched him

somewhere, and miraculously cured him. Now, curiosity got the better of me, so with a straight face, I asked, "Where exactly did Sai Baba touch you?" And oh boy, that set him off! He gave me a death stare, as if I'd just insulted his entire lineage. I could almost see steam rising from his ears.

As luck would have it, just the next week, poor Rama Rao was in a minor accident. Nothing serious, just a few scrapes and bruises, but of course, I couldn't resist. I casually asked him, "So, who caught you while you were falling?" Without missing a beat, he responded with a straight face, "Sai Baba, of course! Baba lifted me up!" I tried to keep a straight face, but inside I was dying of laughter. This man truly believed Sai Baba was his personal bodyguard.

Fast forward to after we had finished constructing all the buildings. Everything was in place, except for one major issue: there was a huge problem with the power supply. During one of our team meetings, as we brainstormed solutions, I turned to Rama Rao and, barely able to contain my sarcasm, asked, "Rama Rao, do you think Sai Baba can help us solve this power problem?"

With full confidence and not a hint of hesitation, he nodded and said, "Yes, absolutely." I couldn't help but chuckle under my breath. In his world, Sai Baba was the answer to everything—plumbing, electricity, you name it! If it were up to him, we'd probably have had Sai Baba handling all our project logistics.

A few weeks later, we had a new addition to the team: Mr. Venugopal from Hyderabad, a mechanical engineer. Now, Venugopal was a piece of work—an absolute character! The man was full of hot air, constantly bragging about knowing influential people all over the world, and every other sentence was about his grand plans to move to the USA. The funny thing? He barely took a bath. Honestly, the smell of his "natural musk" could clear a room! But despite his eccentricities, Venugopal had a fantastic sense of humour. He could make you laugh even when you didn't want to.

One day, Venugopal and I decided to go to Ongole, the district headquarters, to catch a movie. We were given a Hero Honda CD 100 bike for the trip—quite the ride for a couple of guys like us.

Everything was going smoothly until we approached a bridge. Suddenly, the bike skidded out of control, and the next thing I knew, we were being dragged along the rough gravel, clinging onto the bike for dear life. We must've skidded for at least 40 to 50 feet. By the time we came to a stop, my entire backside was scraped raw, and I lost consciousness from the impact.

Hours later, when I finally came to, I opened my eyes to see Rama Rao standing there, looking all spiritual as usual. With his hands clasped and eyes wide, he said, "*Babagaaru great andi, ayine vacchi ikkada theesko vachchadandi*"—which, in plain English, meant "Baba is great, he came and brought you to the hospital!" Even through the throbbing pain, I couldn't help but laugh. Of course, in Rama Rao's world, Sai Baba himself had descended from the heavens to rescue me! But the reality? The man who actually brought me to the hospital was someone named Sai Krishna, a local politician and MLA. The coincidence of the name only added to the humour. I was lying there, bruised and battered, with this hilarious mix-up playing out around me.

I ended up staying in the hospital for a week to recover from the accident. Every night, without fail, Rama Rao somehow made an appearance in my dreams, muttering something about Sai Baba. At this point, I decided it was best to just surrender to the madness and stop teasing him altogether. Life was too short to argue with divine intervention!

During my recovery, I had another visitor—the granddaughter of the elderly couple I was renting my place from. She would come by every so often during her holidays, bringing 'Prasadam' from the Sai Baba temple. Now, she was an absolute stunner—beautiful, with a kind heart. Venugopal, in his usual playful manner, would always say, "You two would make the perfect pair!" But I couldn't help but laugh it off. She was gorgeous, way out of my league, and I was just a scruffy guy still recovering from being dragged down a road by a bike. Her family were landowners, with thousands of acres of groundnut farms. I was, well... just me.

Still, despite my bruised ego (and backside), those moments brought a little light to the otherwise painful experience. It was a strange, funny chapter of my life, full of unexpected twists, divine coincidences, and a whole lot of Sai Baba.

The Naxals

Every other day, Venugopal and I found ourselves making the same treacherous journey to Ongole. The reason? Something as mundane as making a phone call and drinking beer. We had no choice but to travel 22 kilo meters just to reach a functioning phone line, a task that seemed simple on paper but was anything but. The path we had to take was a far cry from smooth highways—after crossing Iskapalli village, we entered a stretch of thick jungle, overgrown with thorny bushes and ominous shadows.

The villagers constantly warned us against traveling at night. The reason? Naxals—armed rebels with a notorious reputation for targeting civilians. The stories were chilling. These bandits would block travellers, rob them of their money, watches, gold—anything of value. And if they found you empty-handed? Well, things could get ugly fast. They didn't kill, but they made sure you remembered the encounter, sometimes leaving behind scars as a reminder of their power. Oddly enough, they never touched our bikes. But every other day, there would be news in the paper about yet another Naxal attack. Fear was everywhere, like a thick cloud hanging over the villages, especially at night.

But Venugopal and I? We were young, reckless, and, frankly, stupid. Instead of heeding the warnings, we devised our own absurd plan. We were already used to carrying underwater torches for work, using them to inspect gravid female shrimp in the hatchery. The light helped us identify dark diamonds and narrow strips that indicated the maturity of the shrimp. But now, we turned those torches into part of our survival strategy. Along with a whistle, we decided to act like police officers whenever we were suspicious of something in the dark jungle.

Whenever we heard a noise or got an unsettling feeling, we would blow our whistle and flash the light randomly, creating an

eerie, scattered pattern across the bushes and trees. The idea was to pretend we were the authorities, maybe part of a search party. Little did we know, Naxals hated the police with a deadly passion. Flashing that light in the dark could've easily made us their prime target, but somehow, we managed to get through each night unscathed. Every time we crossed that jungle, my heart pounded in my chest, the tension in the air so thick it was hard to breathe. Yet, every time we came out the other side, I'd breathe a sigh of relief, laughing off the danger as if it had never really existed.

Despite the warnings from the police and locals, despite the very real threat of being robbed or worse, we kept making that journey. The danger only seemed to add to the thrill. In retrospect, it was a fool's courage—nonsensical bravado fuelled by adrenaline and youthful arrogance. But in those moments, we felt invincible, as though the shadows and dangers lurking in the jungle were nothing more than a part of the game.

The Fishermen Tribe

In the early nineties, the tiger shrimp hatchery technology was a cutting-edge marvel. Borrowed from the Japanese and Taiwanese, it was poised to revolutionize the industry. But with this new technology came new challenges, especially for the local fishing tribes who had lived harmoniously with the sea for generations. Suddenly, along the coast, hatcheries were popping up like mushrooms after the rain—Sharada Hatchery, Coastal Aqua, Mecastar, and many more. These ventures, with their sprawling infrastructure, encroached upon traditional fishing grounds, turning the fishermen's way of life upside down. The buffer zone meant to keep peace between the two worlds was ignored, and tensions were simmering.

To the local fishing tribes, these hatcheries were not just an environmental intrusion—they were a threat to their very existence. One fine day, things reached a boiling point. Around 400 furious fishermen and their families gathered, armed with sticks, rods, and whatever they could get their hands on. It was quite a sight! The women, fierce in their resolve, marched with sarees draped without

blouses, and most of the men walked with bare, sun-tanned chests, muscles rippling with determination. This was no peaceful protest. They meant business, and they were heading our way.

The first casualty of their anger was Sharada Hatchery, barely 800 meters from where I stood at Prathyusha Hatchery. The mob swept in like a violent storm, smashing everything in their path. They didn't stop at property—they hit the workers too, leaving chaos in their wake. I stood there, watching them approach us next. My workers, wide-eyed and trembling, were in a full panic mode. "*Paragettandi!*" they yelled in Telugu, meaning "Run!" or "Escape!" They were ready to abandon ship, and fast.

But I stood firm. "No," I told them calmly. "Stay. I'll handle it." My confidence must've sounded absurd to them. These were hundreds of angry, armed villagers, and here I was, one man standing between them and another potential disaster. Unwillingly, and with obvious scepticism, my workers stayed back, probably thinking I was either brave or completely mad.

As the mob drew closer, the scene was straight out of an epic showdown. In the front row were the old ladies, their weathered faces stern and determined. Behind them stood the burly men, armed and ready to strike. Their approach was like a human tidal wave, ready to crash down on us at any moment. But instead of bracing for impact, I did something that must've looked utterly bizarre.

I stepped forward, right up to the elderly woman who seemed to be leading the charge, and I hugged her. Yes, you read that right—I hugged her. The crowd froze in confusion. And then, with a humble voice, I said, "Amma, I'm just like you. I'm also a labourer, trying to make a living. Maybe I get a few extra rupees, but in the end, we're the same. What's the point of hitting me and your own people? I'll call the promoters. We'll sit down, talk, and work something out."

It was as if my words cast a spell over them. The crowd, which had been moments away from destruction, went silent. The woman, her tough exterior melting, nodded thoughtfully. My workers, who had been half ready to run for the hills, watched in astonishment as

the mob calmed down. The old lady turned to the crowd and said, “He’s one of us. Let’s give them a chance.”

Just like that, the storm subsided. The tension evaporated, and the mob agreed to a meeting the following week to discuss their grievances. As they left, a few of them, with a cheeky grin, swiped some of our tools. We just let them take it. After all, we’d just narrowly escaped disaster, and a few missing tools were a small price to pay.

Venugopal and the others were slack-jawed. They couldn’t believe how the whole thing had played out. I, on the other hand, just smiled. Sometimes, all it takes to defuse an explosive situation is a little empathy, a hug, and, perhaps, the promise of a better tomorrow.

The Non Return Valve

It was the kind of drama that only construction sites could deliver—high stakes, unexpected twists, and just the right amount of absurdity to make you question your career choices. Picture this: the heat of the midday sun blazing down, and there I was, knee-deep in sand, overseeing the final stages of an elaborate drainage system that was supposed to channel used water to the ocean. The only problem? The man who was supposed to ensure everything went smoothly, Subba Rao, had quit mid-project. Just walked away, leaving me to deal with the mess.

But hey, all the hard work was done—or so we thought. The pipes were laid, the system seemed in place, and the only thing left to handle was the drainage itself. We had these massive Hume pipes, 12 inches in diameter, stretching across the sand dunes like some kind of monumental art installation. The plan? Simple. Drain all the used water from various units to a main sump, and from there, let it flow out to the ocean, a good 400-500 meters away.

With my trusty levelling instrument in hand and a Temporary Bench Mark (TBM) as my guide, I set the pipes in place. The slope? Oh, I calculated that meticulously—1 inch for every 10 feet. Perfect, right? Well, not quite. As the work went on, it became clear we needed to dig some serious trenches, some as deep as 12 feet, to maintain that all-important slope. It was no small task, especially

under the unforgiving sun. But progress was progress, and we pushed on, inching closer to the beach.

And then... disaster struck. A creeping doubt slithered into my mind, the kind that gnaws at you until you can't ignore it any longer. I glanced at the slope again. Something wasn't right. If we kept going the way we were, the pipe's end point would wind up below the water level. The very water we were supposed to be draining would have nowhere to go. My stomach dropped. We halted the work, and I made a call no one ever wants to make: "Bring in the consultant."

Soon enough, the consultant arrived, flanked by Raja Rao, the promoter himself—a man who had already sunk lakhs of rupees into this ambitious project. The two of them walked the length of the piping system with me, as if inspecting a crime scene. I could feel the tension rising with every step. We finally reached the final point, where the whole system was teetering on the edge of disaster.

Enter Dr. Bapi Biswas. Oh, Dr. Biswas—known for his mathematical prowess and boundless confidence. He took a deep breath, clearly trying to remain calm, and launched into an elaborate explanation of mathematical models and physics, sprinkling in just enough jargon to sound reassuring. He turned to Raja Rao and, with the kind of gravitas only a seasoned consultant can muster, said, "Mr. Raja Rao *garu*, don't worry. We will install a Non-Returning Valve (NRV). The water will go out, but the sea water—Bay of Bengal, that is—won't come back. The NRV will handle everything."

Now, I couldn't help myself. I blurted out, "But, Sir... this is the Bay of Bengal we're dealing with here!" He turned to me, eyes blazing, and snapped, "Don't speak!" Well, that shut me up quick.

Raja Rao, blissfully unaware of the impending chaos, seemed satisfied. Problem solved, right? Not quite.

That evening, in a turn of events that caught me completely off guard, Dr. Biswas—who never once invited me to a single meeting or party before—asked me to join him at his hotel. There we were, seated at the bar with drinks in hand, when he leaned in, looked me dead in the eye, and said, "In front of promoters, we never discuss

the negatives." I raised an eyebrow and asked, "So, what are we going to do about the drainage?"

He smirked, took a sip of his drink, and replied, "We'll just buy a one HP pump and pump the water out. It'll cost peanuts—just 0.5% of the total management cost."

And just like that, the whole grand piping system, all the labour, all the sweat and sunburns—buried beneath the sand. We ended up pumping the water manually, and the grand plan to drain the ocean became just another day in the unpredictable world of construction.

But hey, at least I got a free drink out of it!

Then onwards, Dr. Bapi Biswas started trusting me and considered me that I can understand science and started talking to politely and logically.

The Van Gogh and Me

That evening, as the sun dipped low over the horizon and the Bay of Bengal's waves roared in rhythm with the wind, I sat on my catamaran, staring at the vast, unyielding ocean. The weight of everything hit me like a punch to the gut. The hatchery, the villagers, the unending struggle—my life seemed to be careening into chaos. And as always, when I felt most lost, my mind drifted to Van Gogh.

Vincent Van Gogh, the tragic figure who never seemed to escape his demons, haunted me like a ghost on nights like this. I had first come across his story in a *Mayura* monthly magazine where Mrs. Nemi Chandra had written a profound piece on his life, titled "*Novigaddida Kuncha*." In Kannada, it translates to "The Brush Dipped in Pain." The title alone was enough to tug at the soul, but the story itself was a deep well of sorrow and brilliance. Van Gogh—the ultimate symbol of tortured genius. He poured his heart and soul into over 800 paintings in his lifetime, and yet, he couldn't sell a single one. He lived in squalor, starving, suffering, and ultimately, dying alone. And in the cruellest irony of all, after his death, his works became worth millions—the sunflowers, the starry skies, the potato eaters, the bridge, each one a masterpiece that the world only recognized after it was too late.

I felt an eerie connection to him. Here I was, sitting in a forgotten corner of the world, worrying about my own survival, about the hatchery, the fishermen, the absurdity of it all, wondering if, like Van Gogh, my efforts would ever amount to anything. His story struck such a chord with me that I felt compelled to write a play based on his life. I poured my heart into that script, crafting what I believed to be the first-ever play about Van Gogh in the country. It was my tribute to the man whose struggles felt too familiar. I thought perhaps, through my play, I could bring some light to his tragic brilliance. It was staged in Mangalore and Mumbai in the year 1995 itself.

But, as the story always seems to go, life had other plans. One day, in the year 1996, a character in the theatre industry, Mr. Prakash Belavadi, swooped in and took my story, adapting it into his own play titled "*Suryakanti*"—Sunflower. The irony didn't escape me. Just like Van Gogh, whose genius was unrecognized in his lifetime, here I was, watching my own work being stolen, repurposed, and presented to the world as someone else's creation. And, of course, it was hailed as an original masterpiece.

I called Mr. A. S. Murthy, the so-called theatre giant, who had snatched my script from Mrs. Nemi Chandra. I asked him to at least acknowledge the effort I had put into writing the play. A simple recognition of my work. But their world was limited by their own arrogance. They couldn't be bothered to acknowledge me. Instead, they claimed that their work was the first and the best, as if my version had never existed.

It was funny, really, in a deeply bitter way. I had always admired Van Gogh's perseverance despite the world's indifference, and now here I was, living a smaller, more mundane version of his tragedy. They took my play, my labour of love, and made it their own. The irony was too thick to cut through, so I did the only thing I could—I moved on, as I always did.

As I sat on that catamaran, staring out at the endless ocean, I felt an odd sense of solidarity with Van Gogh. Unseen, unappreciated, but still creating, still moving forward. And maybe, just maybe, in

some distant future, someone would look back and realize what had been done. But for now, the waves continued to crash, the sun continued to set, and life continued to move in its merciless, ironic rhythm.

Meeting with the Fishermen Tribe

The sun was just beginning to dip behind the horizon, casting long shadows across the sandy coast where hundreds of fishermen and hatchery promoters gathered for what was sure to be an intense meeting. The scene was a mix of chaos and tradition. About 250 to 300 people sat in a haphazard circle on the sand, perched on boulders, stumps, and wooden logs. The heart of the gathering was a large mat woven from palm leaves, spread in the centre, where I sat with Raja Rao, Sudhakar Rao, Prabhakar Reddy, and a few other investors. The air was thick with tension, and the noise from the crowd was so overwhelming that even the roar of the sea seemed muted in comparison.

I began by saluting the crowd, thanking them for their presence. But my words barely registered amidst the cacophony of voices. The crowd was restless, irritable, and their energy was contagious. It didn't take long before someone stood up and barked the first demand, "*Samudra Manadi!*"—the sea is ours! My promoters couldn't help but snicker at the absurdity, but I quickly shut that down with a stern look. "Don't laugh," I said firmly. They didn't like my tone, but they begrudgingly stayed quiet. This was no laughing matter.

Another man stood up, his voice raised above the din. "If you construct the hatchery, we won't have drinking water!" Raja Rao, ever the businessman, snorted dismissively, "Utterly nonsense!" His impatience showed, and the crowd sensed it. The noise surged again, louder this time. Raja Rao pointed at me, clearly frustrated. "You can ask this scientist," he said, almost mockingly. Oh god, I thought, science had no place in this conversation.

I turned to Raja Rao and warned him, "Don't use logic here." But he wasn't having it. His face flushed with anger as he snapped, "*Nuvu evar side ayya?*"—'which side are you on, anyway?'

I couldn't help but smile at the ridiculousness of it all. But before I could answer, another voice chimed in from the crowd. This time it was an older man with a rugged face, his shirt barely clinging to his sun-beaten shoulders. "The hatchery smells!" he yelled. I stifled a laugh. Anyone who had ever been inside a hatchery knew how obsessively clean they were. We kept the place spotless, more hygienic than most homes in the area.

Raja Rao, growing increasingly exasperated, leaned in and whispered, "Answer them one by one." I stood up, trying to hide the amusement in my voice as I addressed the crowd. "You've all raised some solid points," I said, emphasizing the word 'solid' with a grin. Prabhakar Reddy, who had been on edge the entire meeting, practically lunged at me. "What solid points?" he demanded, his eyes flashing with anger.

I chuckled and reassured him, "I never said they were valid points." I turned back to the crowd, adopting a more serious tone. "Look, we can help improve the muddy road you've been using, and we'll even donate to the temple."

The crowd murmured among themselves, and I felt the tension ease—just a little. Then, out of nowhere, an old man from the back shouted, "*Padi lakshalu Ivvanidi!*"—give us ten lakhs! The crowd exploded in noise again, half-drunk and barely coherent, many stumbling over their own words, while others simply passed out on the sand. The scene had descended into complete chaos.

Raja Rao, now thoroughly fed up, muttered under his breath, "I know political leaders. I'll sort this out with the law." I sighed. Bringing the law into this would only escalate things. "We'll have to close the hatchery," I told him, knowing it was a bluff. But desperate times called for desperate measures. "Let's offer them at least three lakhs," I suggested. Reluctantly, Raja Rao agreed, and we announced the offer.

One of the groups, surprisingly, accepted. But before we could celebrate, another faction of the fishermen, fuelled by alcohol and anger, started attacking the ones who had agreed. Fists flew, sticks were brandished, and we barely managed to escape without getting

caught in the melee. We retreated to Vizag, where the real strategy meeting was held.

Mr. Ganta Srinivas Rao, a seasoned politician, looked at me with a wry smile. “More than the tribe, you’ve become the issue,” he said, half-jokingly. I didn’t argue. “Let’s announce that we’ll hire ten young people from their village and give them Rs. 3.5 lakhs,” I proposed. Srinivas Rao raised an eyebrow, but he knew there was no better option. Begrudgingly, everyone agreed.

The very next week, we convened another meeting at the same spot. The tension was just as high, but this time, I came prepared. I made the announcement, and after much debate, shouting, and even a few punches, the fishermen finally accepted. Mr. Raja Rao, one of the wealthiest industrialists in the region, sat cross-legged on the sand, negotiating like a man who was ready to abandon the whole business over these social issues.

It was a surreal sight. Here we were, in the middle of a tribal dispute, trying to keep a multimillion-dollar business afloat, while dodging everything from legal threats to half-drunk fishermen with sticks. The sea might’ve been theirs, but for one chaotic night, we had somehow managed to buy ourselves some time.

The Prawn and the Kingfisher

Once all the chaos settled down, we finally began seed production at the hatchery. First, we had to source the brood stock, which was no small feat. Each tiger prawn, weighing about 200–250 grams, cost a whopping Rs. 5,000. We brought in about 2,000 of them, and we pampered these prawns like royalty—feeding them squid, liver, and all kinds of fish meats. But, due to the stress of the new environment, a few would inevitably die. We’d bury them in the sand, hoping nobody would notice.

Ethamukkala village had this tiny shop that sold Kingfisher beer for just Rs. 27 a bottle, and—though we were very “rare” customers—we might have gone there about seven days a week. Our cook, Subramani, was a gem—a transgender cook who could whip up meals that could make your toes curl. Whenever I had a beer, I made sure to pair it with two prawns as a side dish, savouring the

flavours like it was a royal feast. But there was a catch—these weren't just any prawns. Nope, they were brooders from the hatchery, and in the ledger book, I'd casually note in the remarks section, "Dead. Buried in the sand."

One day, Mr. Bapi Biswas, ever the curious observer, stumbled upon the ledger. His eyes widened as he read the notes, and then he called me over with this bemused look on his face. In his thick accent, he said, "*Shivakumar, ikkada ekkadegthe, akkada iskalo, royyalu dorktayandi,*" which translates to, "If we dig anywhere in the sand, we'll find prawns!" He was, of course, being sarcastic.

He wasn't done yet, though. He insisted that I stop eating the brooders and suggested I buy prawns from outside and just bill it to the company. The whole situation had me in stitches, but I figured it was time to find a more legitimate source for my prawn cravings.

Donkey Meat

One afternoon, Venugopal and I were amusing ourselves by playing catch with a *Tati-Ningu* seed—a hard, round seed about 3-4 inches wide and 1-2 inches thick. We'd throw it as high as we could and then leap to catch it, making a bit of a spectacle of ourselves. Our jumping and antics caught the attention of Seena, the worker who delivered food from the canteen every day. Watching us, he must have felt particularly mischievous because, without warning, he decided to spread a rumour among the other workers. He told them that he had served us donkey's meat for lunch—without even asking if we were okay with it.

Now, walking to the hatchery site from Rajupalem was a routine, and on Sundays, I had noticed small heaps of what looked like donkey meat under the trees—called *Kuppa Gadida Mamsam* locally. I never paid much attention to it, though I did hear whispers about donkey blood being highly prized for its supposed benefits to heart health. It never crossed my mind that people actually ate donkey meat until Seena's little prank.

That day, as we sat down for lunch, I noticed something was a bit off. The meat was chewy, with an unusual, musty flavour. So, I

casually asked Seena, “Why isn’t this meat cooked properly? It’s got a strange taste to it.”

With a smirk, Seena replied, “Sir, it’s all village-style cooking—you can’t expect your city style.” I shrugged it off, not thinking much of it.

It wasn’t until later, after the workers got into some petty argument and Seena’s friend decided to blackmail him, that we learned the truth. The friend let it slip, perhaps hoping to stir up trouble, that Seena had indeed fed us donkey meat that day without our knowledge.

But instead of getting angry, as Seena probably expected, Venugopal and I couldn’t stop laughing. We called Seena over, still chuckling, and told him, “Next time, at least give us a heads-up before you feed us something exotic!”

Seena, looking both sheepish and surprised, mumbled an apology. We made it clear that we weren’t upset, but we did tell him not to trick us like that again. Secretly, I thanked him for adding another quirky experience to my life—I never would’ve dared to try donkey meat on my own, and here I was, unknowingly ticking it off my culinary bucket list.

I shared this story with my son Reshi and my wife Rekha. She then asked me, with a curious smile, to confess everything I’ve ever eaten in my life! Even now, the thought of it brings a smile to my face. What started as a simple game of catch with a seed turned into an unforgettable, albeit slightly bizarre, chapter of my life at the hatchery.

Selling Water

There was a time when the demand for shrimp seed, known as Post Larvae (PL), was through the roof. Farmers would arrive with recommendation letters in hand, desperate to secure their share. The price was set at Rs. 2 per PL, and every batch was handled with utmost care—at least, that’s what we let people think.

We’d dump all the PL into huge 100-litre trash cans filled with water, aerating it like crazy to keep the little shrimp in suspension.

Once that was done, we'd take samples—a litre or two—count the PL, and then pack them into oxygen-filled polythene bags. Each bag held about a litre of water and was topped off with another eight litres. Simple enough, right?

But here's where things got... interesting. During the packing process, with all that aeration and stress, the PL would start jumping around, sticking to the dry walls of the buckets like popcorn in a hot pan. We had a trick for that: a quick splash of seawater, and they'd fall right back into the water. What's a few stray PL? No big deal.

Except, by the end of the process, something magical would happen. Instead of the 100 bags we were supposed to have, we'd end up with 115—sometimes 120! And here's the kicker: I only paid for 100. The extra? Well, let's just say they went under the radar. For the farmers, we simply added water after taking the average, leaving them none the wiser. On each consignment, they unknowingly lost 15-20 thousand rupees. Initially, it wasn't intentional. But later? Well, we just kept it quiet. Why ruin a good thing?

After every packing session, I made sure to play the part of the generous host. I'd throw lavish dinners for everyone, pay their medical bills, donate to weddings and schools, you name it. My popularity skyrocketed in the region. I had no need for a locker to stash my money—it was all stuffed casually into an old kit bag. My clothes stayed outside, and anyone could have helped themselves to the cash. Maybe some did. But honestly? I didn't care. It felt like a gift, and I was too busy enjoying the reputation I'd built to count every rupee.

I'm not sure how much I earned, but I do know one thing: I helped a lot of people, probably to the tune of a few lakhs. And all of it? It was for one reason only—to cement my image and reputation.

Kalnayak- The Bad Leader

In the village of Rajupalem, there were a few kind-hearted landlords who often visited my room in the evenings for a chat. They were simple yet hearty people, and from time to time, they would organize parties on their farms. One evening, they invited me to Ethamukkala, to one of the landlords' farms, where we had a lively

gathering under the moonlight. These men were as raw as it gets—always talking about money, land, sex, cinema, and food. Their conversations had a straightforward charm.

On the way back from the party, we passed a theatre screening the Hindi movie *Kalnayak*, starring Sanjay Dutt and Madhuri Dixit. Naturally, they wanted to catch the second show, which was already playing around 10:45 pm, and we all went inside. I suspect the theatre owner was with us, given how easily we got in. As the movie played, I suddenly felt queasy. The mix of heavy food, moonlit chatter, and the movie must have taken its toll. I stumbled out of the theatre and started vomiting—so violently that I felt even my smallest intestine was emptied out. Dehydrated and drained, I couldn't manage the walk back, so I collapsed into the ticket counter room and dozed off right there.

Unbeknownst to me, the landlords panicked when they couldn't find me. They searched the entire village, my hatchery, the farms, and even my room, which was just 3 km away. They left no stone unturned, desperately looking for me, fulfilling their "best duties" as they called it. Meanwhile, I was blissfully snoring away in the ticket counter, completely unaware of the commotion.

Around 2:15 am, I woke up and groggily realized where I was. Quietly, I jumped over the theatre compound wall and began my journey back to Rajupalem. The village dogs, as if I were a notorious thief, started barking at me relentlessly in the pitch-dark night. The only sound aside from their barking was the distant drip of water, which echoed eerily in the silence. I found a stick by the roadside, hoping to ward off any stray dogs, and continued my slow trek home.

By the time I reached my place, I jumped the compound wall and collapsed onto the cot in the veranda. Exhausted, I immediately fell asleep again.

At around 6:00 am, one by one, the landlords arrived at my place, relieved beyond words to see me. I had no clue about the chaos I had unintentionally caused. They were so overjoyed that they declared we should celebrate that evening, this time not because of a farm

party, but because they had "found" me after my mysterious disappearance!

Arrival of Shivaram and Sathish

Two of my juniors, let's just call them the Mysore Menace, were inseparable. It wasn't because of any shared intellectual brilliance or professional chemistry, oh no. It was simply because they hailed from the same city—Mysore. That seemed to be their entire personality. The moment they figured out they were from the same place, they bonded like glue, and from that day forward, they became a dynamic duo of... utter nonsense.

These two were something else. They weren't just fun-loving; they were walking, talking comedic disasters—deliberately doing nonsense as if it were their sworn duty. They turned every task into a circus performance, gleefully aware of their buffoonery. It was as if they had a personal vendetta against common sense. But the kicker? They did all of this consciously. This wasn't accidental foolishness—oh no, it was a well-thought-out masterpiece of goofiness. They'd plan their pranks and ridiculous antics as if they were preparing for some national championship of idiocy.

If there was work to be done, you could count on these two to do everything but the actual work. Fixing a problem? They'd somehow manage to create two more. It was like their brains were hardwired to malfunction for laughs. And I'll admit, they were funny, but it was the kind of humour where you'd laugh and then immediately question your life choices for being in the same room as them.

They were basically the class clowns who never grew up, and somehow, I ended up being their unwilling audience.

After starting my job at the hatchery, I decided to visit the old campus to show everyone that I had finally "made it." I threw a party for about 80% of the hostel students, sharing stories about the industry and even telling some of them to pack their bags because I could offer them jobs. Little did I know that Sathish and a few others took me seriously! Sathish showed up unannounced. I took him to a nearby hatchery, where Ravikumar Yellanki was working at the time. He had long hair back then, but now, he's bald and has gained

a lot of influence. He's currently one of the country's leading shrimp seed producers and the president of the All India Shrimp Hatchery Association!

Sathish Chandran joined Aqua Star Hatchery and, well, let's just say he began learning rather than working. Every evening, without fail, he would make his way to my hatchery. At that time, hatchery technology was a closely guarded trade secret, and outsiders weren't allowed in. But Sathish would walk 2-3 kilo meters along the beach and reach my place late in the evening. We'd speak in Kannada, and I would share with him all the technical information we both craved.

A few weeks later, Shivaram unexpectedly showed up again. I took him to the same hatchery where Sathish was working, but Shivaram turned down the opportunity because he knew that if they both worked together, one of them would inevitably have to face the consequences. Another hatchery was being set up at Iskapalli, Nellore, owned by Dr. B Mastan Rao, known as BMR. Mahesh Prabhu, who was working there, came to my hatchery, offering me a higher salary and trying to convince me to join BMR Hatcheries. Their office, however, was still under a thatched roof, while I was working in air-conditioned rooms. So, I politely refused but suggested they recruit Shivaram instead. Reluctantly, they agreed and hired him.

The Telegram

I had applied for the instructor post at the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Bangalore, a position just one step below the coveted 'Assistant Professor' rank. When the telegram arrived with my interview intimation, my heart soared with happiness. Finally, a chance to leave the hatchery world behind and embrace the academic life I had always dreamed of. I started making plans to go to Bangalore, excited about what lay ahead. But as soon as I broke the news to Shivaram and Sathish, the atmosphere shifted.

Both of them went from their usual upbeat selves to gloomy shadows of their former selves. It hit Sathish the hardest—he broke down completely. His face was contorted with raw emotion, tears streaming down his cheeks as he begged me not to leave. "It's just a

desert of sand, palm trees, and that endless sea... How can I stay here without you?" he said, his voice cracking with sorrow. He even offered to pack his bags and come with me to Bangalore, anything to avoid being left behind in this desolate place. I tried to calm him down, telling him, "We need to be away from our people during our struggle time. You can't build a career by running away."

As word spread that I was leaving, the entire hatchery seemed to hold its breath. My departure was not just news—it felt like a storm had hit the place. Prathap, Anjaneyulu, Seena—everyone was shaken. Even the workers, hardened by the daily grind, were shocked. I called the Vizag office to inform them of my decision. Their response? Furious. But I had the appointment letter in my hand, and it was crystal clear: the company had the right to sack me at any time, without reason. So why should I care if I was leaving for something better? I had given my heart and soul to this company, but now it was time for me to move on. After a brief exchange, I disconnected the call, not even bothering to ask for my last month's salary. I knew they wouldn't give it anyway.

When I finally left the hatchery to catch the bus at Rajupalem, a sight awaited me that I wasn't prepared for. The entire working staff of 40 people followed me, like a procession, their eyes filled with sorrow. Some were weeping openly. The dhobi—the washerman, Padmanabha—the electrician, even the old people from the bungalow where I stayed, and the canteen staff... they had all gathered at Rajupalem to see me off. Their pleas and tears were overwhelming. "Don't leave," they said. It was as if they were losing a part of themselves.

Seeing their emotions, I felt my resolve waver. I couldn't leave, not like this. So, with a heavy heart, I cancelled my journey for that day and returned to the hatchery. The atmosphere instantly shifted from despair to pure joy. The relief was palpable. I decided to throw a huge party for everyone that night. We celebrated with laughter and food, and I took the time to convince them all that I had already secured a better future, and this was just a part of life's journey.

The next day, with a quieter and calmer farewell, I finally left for Bangalore. But the emotions of that day, the tears, the pleas, and the collective sense of loss stayed with me as I boarded the bus, heading toward a new chapter in my life.

The essence of this chapter lies in two profound lessons: '*Conflict Management*' and '*Living in the Present*'. Immersed in the rhythm of village life, I became one with my surroundings—learning the art of farming, attending local schools, living alongside the tribe, resting/sleeping on the catamaran, walking with villagers, and even night fishing. I respected everyone, offered help whenever needed, and embraced a continuous journey of happiness and learning. At every moment, I was fully content, living in harmony with what was in front of me.

When I chose to enter the world of fisheries, I did so consciously. Knowing this, how could I turn around and blame the heat of Andhra Pradesh, the dust, the modest salary, or the challenging conditions? Instead, I made the deliberate choice to celebrate life, no matter where I found myself. And as I did, the people around me found joy as well. In spreading happiness, I discovered that it has a ripple effect, one that I still continue to share with those around me.

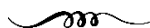
Happiness is not about escaping the circumstances we face; it's about embracing them, finding peace in the present, and allowing that inner joy to permeate everything we do.

Happiness is like the warmth—the *latent heat* hidden within a block of ice. Most people only feel the cold, unaware of the heat that's locked deep inside. The cold represents the challenges, struggles, and hardships of life that most experience on the surface. However, if you truly want to escape that frozen place and to move beyond it, you must melt the ice, releasing the inner warmth that lies within. You must get heated with inner warmth—your capacity for joy, resilience, and love—and let it melt the ice, so that you can flow and acquire the energy all the course of valley of life.

Melting that ice takes effort. It requires exhausting the heat of your inner strength, perseverance, and passion. Just like melting ice, happiness isn't always obvious; it requires effort, sometimes even

pain, as you burn through your reserves to reveal the heat hidden beneath. But it is this inner heat, this ability to keep going, that allows you to transform your surroundings from cold and harsh into something filled with life and light.

“I am forged from pain, disrespect, rejection, failure, and loss. Everything else is just a bonus for me—Magada”



Unusual Rains Canning my dreams

There I was, back in the same room at Hebbal Veterinary College, six long years later. The memory was still fresh—this was the very place where the registrar, Dr. A.V. Rai, had torn into me for one small mistake about the cropping period of the sesame. That blunder had steered me away from agriculture and into fisheries. And now, fate had brought me full circle, but this time, I wasn't a student trembling in front of a scolding registrar. I was there for an interview, for the position of Instructor in Canning Technology.

The panel, as is often the case in such interviews, went through the motions, asking a few routine questions. And just like that, they selected me for the role. But there was a twist. Of all the subjects to teach, it had to be Canning Technology—the one subject I despised with all my heart. Unwillingly, I boarded a bus to go to Mangalore.

On the 4th of February, 1995, I reported for duty, brimming with excitement and joy, as if I were soaring through the sky. It was a dream come true, and I was over the moon. But just four days later, on the 8th of February, my world came crashing down. I was summoned by Dr. T.M.R. Shetty, the Director of Instruction (DI), a man known for his chain-smoking habits and fiery temper. His words were like a cold slap in the face. “Your duty report is cancelled due to the non-submission of the ‘Integrity Certificate,’” he said with an air of finality.

I was stunned. How could this happen? The certificate was something the institution was supposed to handle confidentially. I found myself arguing with Dr. Shetty, trying to explain that it wasn't

my fault. But I could sense his frustration building. He feared I might lose the job altogether if things didn't get sorted quickly.

That same night, without wasting any time, I rushed to Mandya to meet the Social Welfare Officer. But as if fate itself was playing tricks on me, the officer had gone on leave for 15 days. His absence turned out to be the least of my problems. The officer in charge, who was supposed to help in his place, wasn't willing to entertain my request at all. He made me run from pillar to post, dragging the process out for 15 exhausting days. It soon became clear that he was expecting a bribe—he didn't even try to hide it, asking me for money outright.

Frustrated and out of options, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I approached the Deputy Commissioner, narrating my story with all the desperation I felt. Luckily, my honesty and persistence earned me his sympathy. He immediately called the concerned officer and demanded action. Finally, on the 21st of February, 1995, the much-needed certificate was issued. It felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

The very next day, on the 22nd of February, I triumphantly rejoined my duty, determined to move forward despite the obstacles. The entire ordeal had tested my patience, but in the end, I emerged stronger, knowing I had fought for what was right.

I went straight to the department at Technology Wing—that's how it was referred as. It was started in the year 1963 by the Japanese Government as 'Marine Product Processing and Training Centre (MPPTC)', and in the year 1969, it was handed over to the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore to form the first College of Fisheries in the country. I was about to begin my teaching career in the very department I had once despised and vowed never to return to. My hatred for it wasn't due to the topic itself, but because of the peculiar man who once taught it: Mr. Mrithyunjaya Maragal. He was a strange, introverted figure, a man with a cruel streak and a stammering voice that made every lecture feel like an endurance test. To this day, I couldn't understand how the system allowed someone like him to teach.

Mr. Maragal carried himself with the arrogance of a man who believed he knew more than the very inventor of canning technology, Nicolas Appert, the French scientist who pioneered the method. He was always dripping with sarcasm, his voice laced with contempt for his students. There were two canning courses we had to endure. In the first, under Maragal's "guidance," I ended up with a humiliating 'D' grade. But when the second course came around, luck smiled on me—Maragal was off on some "Overseas Development Assistance" (ODA) tour, and the class was handled by the more reasonable Dr. N.S. Sudhakar. This time, I managed to score a 'B'.

When Maragal returned, he made it a point to ask me, with a sly look, which grade I had received in the second canning course. "B," I told him, and he muttered with a sneer, "I'm not a donor like Sudhakar." The man was bitter, holding onto his twisted sense of superiority.

Mr. Maragal was a man who loved to spout philosophy, but none of it seemed to touch his own life. His room was so shabby and ugly. He preached about integrity and ethics, yet he broke the law by lending money at exorbitant interest rates—a practice that would have landed anyone else in trouble. Yet, he hid behind the guise of a good teacher, a reputation that somehow stuck to him like a badge of honour in the eyes of others. But not in my eyes. I saw through the mask, and unlike the others, I wasn't fooled.

Exam Paper Out

It was a time of new beginnings for me and six other instructors who had been freshly appointed. We were all staying in the hostel, navigating our early days of teaching and trying to establish our footing. I quickly became close to the students, not just because I was their instructor, but because of my active involvement in sports and cultural activities. Despite my connection with many of them, I prided myself on my fairness—never favouring anyone, no matter how close we were. I was determined to build my reputation on integrity and character.

One day, as exam season loomed, I found myself tasked with conducting an exam at the main campus. My department, Fish

Processing Technology, was a good 7 kilo meters away, situated near the serene shores of the Nethravati river's backwaters. I carefully placed all the exam papers in the department's almirah and carried one with me in my bag. It was a Saturday, and after a long day, I was enjoying a quiet cup of tea in the hostel mess when I received an urgent phone call. Rushing to the hostel's coin booth, I engaged in a long conversation—some serious issue had come up, and I was engrossed in sorting it out.

Unbeknownst to me, while I was preoccupied, someone had taken advantage of my distraction. They slipped into my room, stole the exam paper from my bag, noted down the contents, and then replaced it, leaving no trace. I remained blissfully unaware of this betrayal for a long time. In fact, it wasn't until 15 years later, when a former student from that batch, feeling the weight of guilt, confessed the whole story to me. The shock of it hit me like a wave of cold water.

The exam took place on Monday, and everything seemed to go off without a hitch. Days passed, and all appeared normal—until one afternoon, Mr. Rajesh K.M., a colleague, walked into my office with an ominous expression. He hesitated before saying, "There's a problem, and if I tell you, it might ruin your career." His words startled me, but I felt a strange calm. I was innocent, so I laughed it off and urged him to speak freely.

What he revealed sent a chill down my spine. "The canning paper was leaked," he said, his voice low. "Everyone wrote the exam perfectly." At that moment, the gravity of the situation hit me, but I maintained my composure. Without missing a beat, I handed Rajesh a blank sheet of paper and asked him to put his complaint in writing. He hesitated, clearly unsure, but I insisted, and finally, he wrote it out.

The moment I had the complaint in hand, I knew I had to act fast. I waited for Mr. Maragal, my former teacher and the bane of my existence, to arrive. As soon as he did, I went straight to him and laid out the issue. His reaction was immediate and cutting. "What I expected has happened," he said coldly, implying that I had

something to do with the leak. My heart sank. He was doubting me—of all people. The insinuation hit hard, but I knew I had nothing to hide.

The matter escalated quickly, reaching the ears of Dr. T.M.R. Shetty, the Director of Instruction, a man infamous for his chain-smoking and explosive temper. Dr. Shetty wasted no time and formed a committee to investigate the leak. Soon, I found myself standing before this committee, being interrogated. I had no choice but to tell them the truth. "I know nothing about the leak," I said firmly. "I didn't offer the course, my name isn't on the paper, and I had no involvement."

Meanwhile, Maragal—ever the antagonist—was trying to pin the blame on me, as if he had been waiting for an opportunity to see me fall. After a thorough inquiry, the committee issued a warning to both of us, concluding the matter. But the damage was done. As we left the room, Maragal turned to me with a twisted smile and said, "You've set a fire on yourself," before awkwardly embracing me in a forced gesture of camaraderie.

I simply smiled and walked away, determined not to let his words or his doubts define my path. I knew the truth—and that was enough for me to keep moving forward.

Unsuccessful Oceanographer

Out of sheer humiliation and frustration, I had lost all desire to continue in the department that had once made me feel so small. I couldn't bear it anymore, so I requested a transfer to the Department of Oceanography. But my struggles didn't end there. When I arrived, I quickly realized that nobody wanted me in this new department either. The Head of Department (HoD) never even offered me a chair for the first 15 days. They were entertaining the contract and project staff but not the permanent staff. I was left to wander, spending most of my time in the library, feeling like a complete outsider.

Eventually, they showed me a place to sit, right next to Dr. Gangadhara Gowda and Dr. Katti. In an effort to better myself, I decided to improve my English and began reading the newspaper. One day, while quietly reading in my corner, the HoD, Dr. TRC

Gupta, stormed into the room, charging at me as though I had committed a serious crime. He scolded me for reading a newspaper in the chamber, as if it were some kind of offense. I sat there silently, suppressing my frustration. After his tirade, he left and returned to his office.

Now, I had always respected Dr. Katti. Even though he had failed me in his subject, I admired him as a teacher. He would often smoke in his chamber, and I never made a fuss about it. But this time, something snapped inside me. I followed the HoD to his chamber, heart racing, and confronted him. "Sorry, sir," I began, my voice steady despite my emotions. "I was reading the newspaper to improve my English, and last I checked, it wasn't a crime to read the paper in the staff room. But there is a law against smoking in an academic institute, and I've noticed it's not being followed."

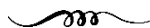
Dr. Gupta was visibly taken aback, shocked by both my boldness and my statement. He, too, was guilty of smoking, just like Dr. Katti, though his brand was ITC small while Dr. Katti preferred Bristol. The realization that I had called out something bigger than a simple disagreement hit him hard. Soon after, the senior staff convened for a meeting. Whatever they discussed behind closed doors, I'll never know, but something changed. The atmosphere softened, and they began treating me with unexpected politeness. But despite this shift, my frustration lingered. The indifferent attitudes of my own teachers weighed heavily on me, and I struggled to find a sense of purpose.

One day, while I was teaching my very first class in Oceanography—on the 16th of August, 1996, to be exact—I was interrupted. It was around 11:20 a.m. when my junior, Mr. Lingaraju, walked into the room and told me I had an urgent phone call from Mandya. Without reacting visibly, I calmly stepped out of the classroom. Biju Joseph was with me, and over tea, I quietly said the words that would change everything: "My father has passed away."

Biju's face crumbled at the news, and without hesitation, he dropped everything to help me. He took me to Kankandy on his old, antique Kawasaki bike. At that moment, I was not just a teacher or a

colleague. I was a son who had just lost his father, trying to navigate an overwhelming sense of loss amidst all the other struggles I had been facing. The whole journey I was crying. I had no tears when I finally reached the home.

I returned to work shortly after, but the humiliation in the department persisted. Determined to find a way out, I approached Mr. Dhruva Narayan, the leader who had originally helped me secure my position. As a Member of the Board of Regents of UAS, Bangalore, he had the influence to assist. Without hesitation, he called Dr. S.L. Shanbogue and recommended my transfer to the Zonal Agricultural Research Station at VC Farm, Mandya. I became the second person to secure a posting close to their hometown.



Rains in the Southern Dry Zone VC Farm

After the sudden demise of dad, my mother was living alone in Mandya, and using this as a valid reason, I requested a transfer. Coincidentally, one of my colleagues, Dr. K.S. Ramesh, who was stationed at Mandya, wished to be transferred to the college. On 31st April 1997, I was officially relieved, and by 2nd May 1997, I had joined VC Farm as a "Research Assistant." VC Farm was a huge area with 625 acres and established in the 1932. Dr Leslie C Coleman, Canadian Entomologist and Plant Pathologist, Dr Ragi Lakshmanaiah—who had developed more than 8-10 varieties of 'Indaf' Finger millet (Indo-Africa), Padmashri Dr Mahadevappa, Dr Hunasagi and other great scientists worked there. It was one of the biggest agriculture research station situated next to the 'Visvesvaraya Canal'—a main canal from the KRS dam. The farm was named after a great engineer of Mysore Palace Sir M Visvesvaraya (Sir MV). The station had developed many varieties of paddy, sugarcane, finger millet, maize etc. Japanese even started 'Indo-Japanese Agriculture Training Centre' at VC Farm.

Upon reporting to the Associate Director of Research (ADR), I was assigned to the 'Inland Fisheries Unit,' where I met Mr. G.P. Puttaswamy—a peculiar individual who reminded me of 'Samsa,' the suspicious playwright I'd mentioned in another chapter. Much like Samsa, Puttaswamy was distant and constantly mistrusting everyone around him.

The ADR, Dr. K.K. Avadani, was a short, stern figure—a breeder of ragi who was peculiar in his own ways. He was a strict enforcer of

rules. The office timings were set at 8:30 a.m., and if anyone arrived even as late as 8:45 a.m., they would be marked absent. It was a peculiar environment, with a mix of eccentric personalities, including Dr. Gubbaiah, Dr. Vidyachandra, Dr. Shankaraiah, Dr. Kenchaiah, and others. Despite the odd atmosphere, impressive research was taking place in the fields of paddy, ragi, sugarcane, maize, and fodder.

Recognizing my active and engaging nature, the administration allowed me to handle the Animal Science course at the College of Agriculture. My unique teaching style, with its blend of language, humour, and creativity, quickly drew the students toward me. I didn't just teach; I became a mentor, and soon, I found myself deeply involved in extracurricular activities. I trained them in music and drama, forming a close-knit group of talented individuals. Together, we performed dramas at esteemed theatres like Kalakshetra and Rangayana.

Bindu, Nataraj, Salma, Yashwant, Asha, and several others became more than just students—they were like family. Our bond grew deeper with every play, every rehearsal, and every performance. They weren't just my students; they were a part of my life, and we shared many unforgettable moments. Those days filled me with a sense of purpose and belonging that transcended the challenges of my professional struggles.

Gund Batta —A male Paddy Seed

In 1999, an ordinary day took an unexpected turn. A farmer, dressed in a crisp white dhoti and shirt, stood outside my chamber. I casually asked him what he was looking for, and he mentioned that he wanted to meet Dr. Prakash, one of my colleagues. He had come to buy paddy seeds. I pointed him in the right direction and went off to the field for my regular work.

Later that day, I sat down for lunch with Prakash, Shekar, and a few others, as we often did. While we ate, Prakash casually mentioned, "You know, that farmer you met earlier? He has a daughter, and she's quite good-looking. If you're interested, I could talk to him about a marriage proposal." His words stunned me—out of nowhere, I found myself both shocked and strangely intrigued.

That farmer, didn't go home with just paddy seed, he even packed me '**Gund Batta**'—a male paddy seed.

That night, I couldn't shake the idea from my mind. The next Sunday, on 7th February 1999, I arranged to visit the farmer's village, Somanathapura, with my friend Rajanna, who ran a fuel station in Mandya. Rajanna, always the chatterbox, launched into a detailed conversation about agriculture, spouting facts and figures, though none of it really mattered to me at the moment. I was anxious and uncertain about the visit.

When we arrived at the farmer's house, a young woman, modestly dressed, entered the room to serve us tea. She was fair-skinned and clearly well-educated, carrying herself with a quiet grace. I couldn't quite place my feelings in that moment—I was caught between fascination and hesitation, uncertain of what to do next. After a brief introduction and some polite conversation, we excused ourselves and decided to visit the nearby Somanathapura temple, an architectural marvel of ancient Indian engineering.

On our way back to Mandya, Rajanna suddenly pulled his scooter to the side of the road for a quick break. As we stood there, he turned to me with a stern expression and asked, "Well? What's your decision? What do you think of the girl?"

I paused, still unsure, and hesitated in my response. "I'm still thinking about it," I said. That's when Rajanna's patience ran out. His face flushed with frustration, and in a fatherly tone, he barked, "What is there to think about, *Magane*? If you don't marry this girl, you'll regret it for the rest of your life!" His words carried a weight that lingered in the air, and in that moment, I felt the pressure of his judgment, urging me to make a decision.

That evening, after the encounter with Rajanna, I casually mentioned the whole thing to my mother. I didn't make a big deal out of it, just tossed it into the conversation while sipping tea, thinking she wouldn't take much notice. But I was wrong. She didn't say much at that moment, but I could tell something had sparked in her mind. The next morning, as I was getting ready for the day, she calmly approached me, her face filled with the wisdom only mothers

seem to have, and said, "I've been thinking about that girl you mentioned. I have a gut feeling—she'll be a good match for you. You should marry her."

I paused, slightly surprised by her conviction. She was speaking with the kind of certainty that made it hard to argue. I just nodded, a little unsure, but her confidence had planted a seed of certainty in my mind too.

Sensing that my mood was still a bit uncertain, my mother decided to take matters into her own hands. Without asking for any further input, she took charge of the situation. By the time Sunday rolled around, she had invited practically half the extended family over to our house, all under the guise of a "casual gathering." But I knew what was up—this was her way of setting things in motion.

The plan was grand: after the family gathering, we'd all take a trip to Somanathapura, not just to meet the farmer and his daughter, but also to visit the historical temple in the village. It was her way of killing two birds with one stone—doing a little family outing while subtly checking off the unofficial "engagement reconnaissance mission." My mother had turned this simple introduction into a full-fledged event, and before I knew it, the entire household was buzzing with excitement and whispers of my possible wedding.

It was as if my marriage was already halfway decided, and I hadn't even had time to fully process it yet!

It was on 13th February, 1999 everyone went in a bus. They started making fun looking at the rush—lot of people on the roof of the bus. All of us were greeted well. we all saw the girl —Rekha well and all of them liked her and were happy and all of them had decided to have engagement on 28.2.1999. That's it.

Phone call at 4.40 p.m.

The tariff for STD call was so high. Every day, my office used to end at 4.0 pm. I used to travel in a bike to reach Mandya from the VC Farm. I fixed one STB booth to make regular call every day at 4.40 pm. I was the only person who used give them good revenue in a single day. Hours together I used to talk. May 80% of salary was

spent on that. I just wanted to explain Rekha about my likings and my personality. I used to say ‘I will speak until marriage. After that I may not’. She used listen to me carefully, lovingly. She was a master degree holder in the philosophy. But she used to talk less. I made a ‘*Collage*’ depicting my regular phone calls at 4.0 p.m. and my moods. Even today, we have preserved it at our home. A master piece depicting the love during those days.

It hung in the hall for many years. After my son began creating his own artworks, it was stored away. As time passes, its age adds both value and cherished memories.

100 days before my marriage

Every single day, I found myself pouring my heart out onto paper. I would write down my thoughts, my emotions, and every little conversation we had. It became my ritual, almost like a love letter in progress. Once a week, I would gather all these notes, make photocopies, and post them to her. I never imagined those words would mean much to anyone else, but Mr. Chikkalingaiah, the office assistant who helped me with the photocopying, had become my unintended audience. As he read through the pages, he would often chuckle and tell me, "These stories of yours, they could easily turn into a novel." His words amused me, but deep down, it added a touch of magic to my ordinary scribbles.

I wanted to show her the colours of my personality, the vibrancy I carried within, so I decided to paint her something special. It was a painting of colourful bells, each one resonating with a part of my spirit, and on the top, I carefully inscribed the words, “If you open this card, you will have to give me a big kiss.” I could already imagine her curiosity when she saw it. When she opened the card, inside, she found the punchline: “If I knew it was so easy, I would have asked for something bigger.” Those cheeky lines weren’t mine; I had borrowed them from an Archie’s Gallery greeting card, but they perfectly captured the playful tone I wanted to set.

It was May 13, 1999—her birthday. I was nervous but determined to make it unforgettable. Along with the painting, I gifted her a gold ring. I could see her eyes light up in surprise, and

the room buzzed with a mix of excitement and disbelief. Her sisters—Yamuna and Nethra—and her brother Sudhakar stood by, watching with wide eyes. They couldn't hide their amusement as they took in the whole scene, each of them smiling, almost in disbelief. It was all so new to them, this whirlwind of affection, playfulness, and a budding romance wrapped in such unconventional gestures. They were just as shocked as they were entertained by the unfolding love story.

And there she was, holding the ring, the painting, and my heart, all while being surrounded by her family, who were enjoying every moment of this spectacle. It was the beginning of something beautiful, something that had once felt like a distant dream, now coming alive in vibrant colours, playful banter, and quiet moments of affection.

I wrote everything I felt, wrote a standard Operating Procedure (SoP) for happy marriage, I predicted the issues and gave my strategy and solutions for the unknown predicted problems. In fact, everything I predicted had happened to me and I could resolve them casually because, I was so prepared.

Entry of Rekha

After the engagement, Rekha's uncle approached me with a request to move the wedding up from June to May, so that all the children could attend. As he spoke, he was casually smoking right in front of my mother, which didn't sit well with me. I politely asked him to throw the cigarette away and said, "I'm not getting married for anyone's convenience. The wedding is set for June 20th. Whoever can attend, let them attend." His face turned red with fury, and he stormed off without saying a word.

My wedding card was simple, featuring a quote inspired by Vincent Van Gogh⁹ that read, "*Nanna Preethi NeDeyaballadu...Nanna preethi beLeyaballadu mattu MaatanaaDaloo balladu..nimmanthaha sahrudayigaLoDane mattu nanna baLa sangatiyaaguttiruva RekhaLoDane*" — which translates to, "My love

⁹ A greatest artiste of 18th century from the Netherlands

can walk, grow, and even converse with people like you and my love, Rekha." That's how I was so connected with the crazy artiste and his philosophy. Even today, my office backdrop is 'Sunflower'—one of the famous paintings of Van Gogh. The wedding day came on 20th July 1999, held at Mandya. It was a beautiful affair with minimal issues. I had this grand idea of having a local band perform soulful gazals to set a romantic and serene mood during the reception. I was quite proud of this idea. The band showed up, instruments ready, but when they started singing, instead of gazals, out came patriotic songs one after the other! To my horror, everyone in the audience burst into laughter, poking fun at me. My big cultural moment had become a comedy. To save face, I stood up and, with a grin, said, "Well, I'm a true patriot at heart. I thought it would be a great idea for everyone to enjoy some national pride at my wedding!" That comment earned me more teasing, but the day ended on a light-hearted note.

I had always wanted to invite children from an orphanage to celebrate milestones, to bring joy into their lives, even if just for a day. However, despite my best intentions, those plans didn't come to fruition the way I had hoped. But when my son, Reshi, turned four, we decided to celebrate his birthday at one of the orphanages in Srirangapattana. It was a modest affair, driven by the desire to share our joy with those who rarely experience such celebrations.

After the event was over, I found myself with just Rs. 50 left in my pocket. It was a sobering reminder of how financially strained I was at the time. Yet, even with so little left, I didn't feel defeated. Instead, I clung to hope. It was that hope, the unwavering belief that better days would come, that kept me going. It wasn't about how much money I had but about the meaningful connections we made that day, and the knowledge that I was trying to make a difference, however small, in the lives of others.

That moment, when I was broke yet filled with the hope of brighter days, is etched in my memory as a reminder of resilience, of finding light even in the most challenging times. It was a celebration not just of my son's life, but of the strength it takes to keep moving forward, no matter how dire the circumstances.

All my friends came in big number and stayed in a local hotel. The whole night, they made Hungama and did all the nonsense in the hotel. I joined them at late night and celebrated with them and fell asleep. Morning my brother must have searched for me for an hour. I was so drunk and slept somewhere and forgotten that I had to attend some rituals.

Beautiful girl in the reception

Sanjunath, my classmate, roommate—the renowned photographer from our college—whom I fondly called Mani Ratnam for his cinematic touch—arrived at the reception with his camera, ready to capture every moment. As always, he had an eye for candid shots, turning even the simplest moments into picture-perfect memories. The atmosphere was joyful, everyone mingling and celebrating.

In the middle of all the chaos, a strikingly beautiful girl approached with a small group of friends to offer their congratulations. As they greeted us, her presence caught my eye. Without missing a beat, I asked her, “Where were you hiding all these days?” She gave me a puzzled look and asked, “Why?”

With a mischievous grin, I replied, “If I had met you earlier, why would I have married this girl?” pointing playfully towards Rekha. The room erupted in laughter, the guests enjoying my cheeky comment, except for me. I put on a serious face, not breaking character for a second, as Sanjunath clicked away, capturing the moment in perfect timing.

Even in the midst of such an important day, I couldn’t resist adding a bit of humour and fun to lighten the mood. It’s just how I’ve always been—light-hearted and full of fun, no matter the situation. The camera continued to snap away, documenting the laughter, my serious posing, and the lively atmosphere that made the day unforgettable.

Bedara Kannappa¹⁰

Subbi, Ashok, and a few others had just returned from Bangladesh, bringing with them a gold ring and a bottle of champagne. Rekha and I decided to spend our first night at a hotel, as my house was packed with people. Wanting to add a bit of excitement to the evening, I proudly brought out the champagne bottle. But here's the catch—I had absolutely no idea how to open it! I casually placed the bottle on my thighs and began attempting to pop the cork. Suddenly, with a loud pop, the cork shot out at lightning speed, narrowly missing my right eye. It slammed into the ceiling and bounced right back, hitting me square in the face.

In that split second, I realized just how lucky I was not to lose an eye! Otherwise, on the very first night of our married life, it could've been a case of "ah...ondu...ah...eradu" (one...two)—counting my steps quite literally! The entire night, all I could think about was that *cork*—'R' silent—and how I narrowly avoided disaster.

No Honey on the Moon

We had decided to go to Ooty for our honeymoon, a perfect escape to the misty hills. Excitement filled the air as we packed for the trip. I had neatly tucked a bundle of notes at the bottom of the suitcase, thinking everything was in order. Rekha, being meticulous as always, was packing towels. I casually told her, "You can leave the towels, the hotel will have plenty." She agreed and removed them from the suitcase. Unbeknownst to us, along with the towels, she had also unknowingly left behind the money!

We arrived in Ooty, the crisp mountain air greeting us with a sense of serenity. But that peaceful feeling didn't last long. When we realized there was no money in the suitcase, panic struck. I frantically searched every corner of our luggage, but the money was gone, left behind in our rush to pack. My heart sank as I explained the situation to Rekha, who looked just as bewildered as I did.

I quickly called my friend Shivaram and told him about the disaster. He was hanging out with Ramesh, Dinesh, and the rest of

¹⁰ Tribal person—a devotee of God, who donated his eyes to the lord shiva

the gang. Without a second thought, they all decided to come to Ooty, bringing the much-needed cash with them. The next day, they arrived with smiles and plenty of jokes about our forgetfulness. They stayed with us for a day, turning what was meant to be a romantic honeymoon into a mini-college reunion.

Though we had the money now, the original mood of the honeymoon had shifted. But, as always, we made the best of it. It was like being back in college, enjoying the chaos with friends. We made memories on that trip, riding the narrow-gauge train to Mettupalayam, splashing around at 'Black Thunder' water park, wandering through the botanical gardens, and enjoying boat rides.

Despite the initial mishap, the trip was filled with laughter and adventure. We returned to Mysore, ready to settle back into our routines, but with a shared story that would bring a smile to our faces for years to come. The honeymoon didn't go as planned, but it was unforgettable in its own, unexpected way. From the very start, Rekha quickly became close to my friends, effortlessly blending in with everyone by joining in on the jokes and humour we shared

The F1: Reshi Magada

When Rekha was expecting, she went to her native place after the traditional "seemantha" ritual, done after the seventh month of pregnancy. I made frequent trips to visit her, eagerly awaiting the arrival of our baby. It was 2001, and on May 13th, Rekha's birthday, our son Reshi was born. My birthday, being on May 20th, made the whole month even more special.

Reshi was quite heavy at birth, and the night before, I couldn't sleep at all, filled with nervous anticipation. I spent the entire night sitting in a chair, lost in my thoughts. When I received the news of his normal delivery, I just broke down—crying tears of joy, emotion pouring out of me. It was such an overwhelming moment.

I called all my friends and family to share the good news. When I called Subbi and Ashok and said, "It's a boy!" Subbi's first question, with typical humour, was, "Colour?" I just laughed, knowing that Reshi had inherited his mother's fair complexion. But of course, the brains—that was from me!

The diary became my ‘Personal Bhagavad Geetha’ or bible—a testament to the values I cherished and the experiences that shaped me. Many juniors and friends would seek me out, not for advice on mundane matters, but to engage in conversations about aesthetic love, the essence of life, and the art of building a successful and happy existence. I’ve read excerpts from that diary to audiences small and large, and each time, its words resonated deeply. Most of those who have gathered around me over the years are now thriving in their chosen paths—artists, professionals, responsible individuals who cherish life and understand its beauty. They’ve learned, as I have, that life is indeed beautiful, and that true happiness is not stumbled upon, but carefully crafted through the choices we make and the passions we pursue.

The paintings I created, especially during those years, have become more than just art; they are monuments to a life well-lived and well-loved. Every brushstroke on the canvas reflected the joy, love, and peace I felt, capturing moments that words could never fully express. Even now, when I look back, I sometimes wonder if I could ever recreate those exact emotions or find words that express love and happiness with such purity and spontaneity—it just happened, effortlessly, and continues to unfold, like an unending melody.

And now, that legacy of happiness continues through my son, Reshi. Seeing my painting of ‘Bells,’ he took up the brush and created his own masterpiece with oil paints. In his strokes, I see the same joy, the same zest for life, and the same deep appreciation for beauty that filled my own heart. He carries forward this legacy of love and celebration, proving that life, indeed, is beautiful when we know how to celebrate it, and that the recipes for happiness can be passed down, generation to generation. As Sadhguru—*Jaggi Vasudev* said “When a child comes into your life, it is time relearn life, not teach them your ways.”

Happiness is a by-product of pure love. Why is it that the love stories considered "great" always seem to end in tragedy? Is it because suffering adds depth, or because pain magnifies the intensity of emotions? I often wonder why love needs to be drenched in sorrow

to be celebrated by the world. According to me, Romeo and Juliet, Salim and Anarkali, and Laila and Majnu are not the epitome of great love stories; they are, in fact, stories of failure. Society has immortalized these tales, often equating their tragic ends with the highest form of love, but I see them differently. To me, love should not be measured by how much suffering or sacrifice it involves but by how much it grows, sustains, and endures.

These famous stories, while filled with passion, end in separation, death, and unfulfilled desires. They are love stories halted in their tracks, never given the chance to evolve, to mature, or to manifest into something more profound. Is love really only "great" when it's cut short by external circumstances? Or is it when it survives the trials of life, enduring over time, that it becomes truly remarkable?

In my view, love is meant to be lived, not just mourned. It's about two people building something together, facing challenges and still standing strong. When we elevate tragic love stories, we sometimes forget that the true triumph in love lies not in its intensity but in its resilience. Love that survives, grows, and transforms over time is far more inspiring than love that burns brightly and then fades into ashes.

Romeo, Juliet, Salim, Anarkali, Laila, and Majnu—they all faced love's potential but fell short of experiencing its full journey. They became prisoners of fate, unable to see love through to its greater purpose: companionship, growth, and shared fulfilment. Tragedy does not define the depth of love; perseverance does.

For me, the real beauty of love is not in its demise but in its continuation—two souls evolving together. True love doesn't seek martyrdom; it seeks a life lived in unison, enduring through time. That's the kind of love worth celebrating, not the love that dies before it truly lives.

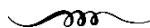
As for me, I'm a bit different—yes, I have an ego, but it's what I call a "harmless ego." It doesn't seek validation from others.

My love didn't need a grand finale of tears or loss to prove itself. It happened, and what's even more beautiful is that it's still happening. Why should I seek the world's endorsement to prove it's

real? I don't need tragedy to sanctify my love. I know, deep within, that ours is pure, genuine, and true. We celebrated every moment, every emotion, without the need to withhold or romanticize pain. We were open and vocal about our love, expressing it in words, in actions, in laughter, and in togetherness.

My love is ongoing, like a present tense that refuses to fade. It's not just a fleeting moment to be remembered, but a continuous experience, a journey that keeps on unfolding. In my world, love doesn't need to be marked by heartbreak to be called "great." Ours is the GOAT—Greatest of All Time—not because it ended tragically, but because it has never ended. It evolves, it thrives, and it continues to be celebrated every day, without the need for a dramatic conclusion.

“If the fish had shut its mouth, it would not have been in trouble”



Ocean Currents 1.0

Back to School

My journey back to college after teaching for nearly seven years felt like a step backward, especially with only a bachelor's degree in hand. Entering the university system at that level made climbing the academic ladder seem nearly impossible. Despite this, my passion for research was undeniable, and even in my role as a Research Assistant (RA), I was confident in handling research projects independently.

At one of the annual technical meetings, however, Dr. Basavaraj Y. — *a great egoistic scientist* humiliated me in front of a large gathering of scientists, insisting that RAs should not be given independent research programs. His comment hit hard, but I wasn't one to stay silent. I confronted him right there, in front of the Director of Research, Dr. Krishnappa. To my relief, Dr. Krishnappa saw my potential, calmed me down, and granted me the authority to handle independent projects.

In doing so, I became one of the very few, if not the only, RAs in the entire university to manage independent research. This opportunity validated my craving for research and drove me further to prove that one's title doesn't limit one's capability. My passion, determination, and defiance in the face of setbacks fuelled my desire to contribute meaningfully to the scientific community, and I was determined to push beyond any limitations placed on me.

I was not the only one who was undergoing these trauma. Myself, swamy, soma and anjan all were in the same boat. We were

virtually humiliated by some of the teachers. The trauma doubled, because all were doing masters on 'loss of pay'. The family has to run as usual, education fee, travel, research expanses etc.

I registered for the courses in the College of Fisheries, Mangalore and wanted to take one of the sober teachers as my Major Advisor. Dr. Keshavanath—another sadistic teacher, who was utter nonsense and opposed it. I studied the university law well and defended my case and took Dr. C Vasudevappa as my advisor. I undertook my research at VC Farm, Mandya.

Blunders of Science

During my research program, I quickly learned the real "nuisances" of scientific research works. Dr. K M Shankar, hailed as a sensible and brilliant scientist, was busy promoting biofilm-based aquaculture as if it were the next big thing. A group of equally enthusiastic scientists even organized an international workshop around it. Of course, there was nothing revolutionary about it—they were just slapping a fresh coat of paint on old ideas. To this day, they're proposing brilliant concepts like fixing nine bamboo poles per square meter to boost fish production. The catch? None of these so-called experts have ever set foot in a real field or worked with farmers and do not know the economics of farming; but capable of writing number of papers on these non-viable concepts.

I saw many of the self-claimed great scientists conducting experiments without suitable experimental designs, partitioning of tanks using mesh to create replications, where all the water quality parameters influence by one another, conducting experiments on brand names. I'm not sharing all of this to hide anything; I voiced my objections even during my doctoral studies, but they fell on deaf ears among the decision-makers. The point I am trying convey is that I cannot keep quiet when I see the blunders at least in my scope of work. "It's often safer to follow the wrong majority than to stand alone in being right. However, Shivakumar Magada won't do that."

Without any grasp of real-world economics or practical application, they boldly claimed to have developed a ground-breaking technology. And yes, the department proudly displays a

poster declaring this “innovation” to this very day. Of course, to add credibility, a few scientists from Wageningen University, Netherlands, endorsed it—because, as we all know, anything from the West and the “whites” must be worth celebrating.

Don’t think I’m only speaking out boldly now, twenty-five years after these scientists retired. I openly challenged their flawed concepts right during the conference itself, but they simply refused to listen. Armed with their seniority and positions, they dismissed my concerns and carried on, becoming mostly irrelevant in the industry, except for a select few.

At the time, I was deeply involved in research on the use of different substrates to improve the growth and survival of freshwater prawns. Following the recommendations of earlier scientists, I used paddy straw as a substrate at 20 tons per hectare. The result? The entire water turned a tan colour, and all the prawns died almost instantly. Clearly, their “recommended” solutions were impractical. Bamboo, another option they proposed, was far too expensive to be feasible.

That’s when I decided to take a different route. After conducting thorough research, I advocated for the use of earthen pipes, a more practical and scientifically supported alternative. This approach proved far more effective, and unlike my counterparts, I had actual results to back up my claims.

Son and Father going to School

After completing my master’s degree, I decided to pursue a PhD. It was during this time that I moved my family from Mandya to Mangalore. One of the most amusing yet humbling experiences was dropping off my son, Reshi, at his Montessori at the ‘School of Roshni Nilaya’ every morning at 9 a.m. Both of us, father and son, would head off to school together—it felt like I was starting school all over again.

But behind the smiles and routine, I was facing some of the most humiliating and stressful times of my life. Financial pressure was mounting, and social stress followed closely behind. Despite being well-regarded as an “Aquaculture Consultant” and known for my

technical expertise, I found myself in situations where some of the teachers openly insulted us in front of the students. They made it seem as though we knew nothing. The sting was especially sharp when I found myself scoring less than my own students, despite all my experience.

It was infuriating to see that some of these very teachers, who had never even seen live shrimp or algae, were reading outdated textbooks and attempting to "teach" us. They lacked hands-on experience yet behaved as though they had mastered every subject under the sun. It was a harsh reality to witness—people who had no real knowledge or field experience lecturing about aquaculture and its advancements.

During this period, I constantly felt underestimated and humiliated, not because I lacked the knowledge, but because the system valued arrogance and theory over practical, on-the-ground expertise. It was a tough pill to swallow, but it made me more determined than ever to push through the challenges.

A drama Written by Dr Shivakumar Magada

One day, while traveling in a city bus near Town Hall in Mangalore, I noticed a board that read: "Sanket Troupe staging a play written by Shivakumar Magada, 'Van Gogh,' tomorrow at Town Hall." I was taken aback, seeing my play being staged in such a prominent auditorium. Curious and excited, I decided to attend the next evening.

At 6:00 PM, I arrived quietly, watched the entire play, and at the end, they held a formal ceremony. Intrigued by the experience, I approached the organizers and asked, "Who is Shivakumar Magada here?" They responded, "He's the writer, but he's not present." Then they asked, "Why do you want to know?" I smiled and said, "That's me."

Their shock was palpable as they quickly gathered themselves, making an impromptu announcement. The atmosphere shifted dramatically, and they honoured me on the spot. It was a surreal moment. I appreciated their performance, though I noticed they had made a few changes to the play to suit their convenience. I gently

advised them not to alter it, as the play was based entirely on the true story of Van Gogh, and its authenticity mattered. They agreed to my suggestion.

A few days later, the same troupe performed the play in Mumbai, winning prizes. These kinds of unexpected twists and turns have happened frequently throughout my life, and I remember them all vividly. That's why the "Arabian Sea" within me feels more turbulent than calm.

Moulting

I began my research journey at the Zonal Agricultural Research Station in Mandya, with an urgent need for prawn seeds. This search led me to the shores of the Bay of Bengal, specifically to Classwin Hatcheries in Muthukadu, Chennai, where I met Shivaram. At that time, I was navigating a severe financial crisis, but the fire to pursue my research kept me moving. While there, I ran into Dr. Mastan Rao, the promoter of BMR Hatcheries, someone who knew me well. Out of sheer frustration, and perhaps a bit of jest, I told him I was ready to leave the academic world and join his hatchery. To my surprise, he didn't hesitate—he agreed right away.

But Shivaram was taken aback by my casual offer. His shock carried through the entire night, and he couldn't shake it off. We spent hours discussing my future, my choices, and the consequences of stepping away from academics. Despite not having an explicit reason, he strongly advised me not to make the jump to industry, as if he sensed something I couldn't see. It was the kind of concern that comes not from logic, but from a deep understanding of paths untaken. He assured me, however, that he would help support my education. Financial support wasn't something I expected from him—after all, everyone was fighting their own battles—but in my most challenging times, he stood by me. Friendship and support sometimes arrive in the most unexpected ways.

That night, as we talked about our futures and the unpredictable roads ahead, a hatchery boy came over, holding a glass beaker filled with shrimp larvae. He told us they weren't moulting, and I casually asked what they were. He explained they were doing trials on

Litopenaeus vannamei, the newly introduced white-leg shrimp, brought in to replace the tiger prawn, which was suffering from disease issues. Without thinking much, I grabbed some whisky, poured a bit into the beaker, and suggested leaving it on the table for a while. After 20 minutes, to our astonishment, the shrimp started moulting.

We celebrated, not because we had solved a global crisis, but because, in that moment, we had stumbled upon something new—something unexpected. It wasn't about knowing all the answers, but about questioning everything we saw, taking risks, thinking outside the box. I suppose that's where I earned my reputation as a "problematic person" back at V C Farm—a title that, in its essence, reflects the relentless curiosity I carry to challenge the status quo.

This story is a reminder of how research is not just about facts and data. It's about curiosity, risk, and above all, the courage to experiment, fail, and then laugh at the absurdity of it all. It's not always about the destination; sometimes, the journey and the people you meet along the way shape your life and thinking in ways you never imagined.

The Prawn Again

I had a deep fascination with freshwater prawns, and for my doctoral research, I continued exploring this species, focusing on "Claw Ablation of Prawn *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* and its Effect on Growth and Survival." Arthropods, like prawns, are known for their ability to regenerate limbs. Prawns have five pairs of walking legs, called "pereopods," and five pairs of swimming legs, known as "pleopods." The second pair of walking legs can grow to two or three times the length of their body, serving as a powerful defence mechanism. However, cannibalism and "Heterogeneous Individual Growth (HIG)" are prevalent among prawns, where some individuals grow much faster than others.

My research was focused on determining the ideal age for cutting the second pair of legs and the appropriate stocking density to maximize growth and survival. It was a hands-on, field-oriented research project, addressing practical issues—a principle I strongly

believed in, as it aligned with the fundamental aim of the university: to solve real-world problems through research.

Midway through my doctoral journey, my major advisor received a better offer from the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) in Hyderabad and left. This put me in a difficult spot, as I needed a new advisor to guide me. I approached several faculty members, including Dr. Shivananda Murthy, a professor we used to trouble during our undergraduate days. He graciously agreed to guide me, and with his support, I completed my doctoral degree successfully.

When I finally saw my marks card, I had scored 8.96 out of 10.0—just 0.4 short of becoming a gold medallist. At such an advanced level, I could have negotiated with the professors to push my score higher, but I didn't bother. I knew deep down that I didn't need an external medal because, in my heart, I knew that "I am the gold."

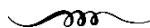
In life, we often chase after things we don't truly need, believing they'll somehow add meaning or value to our existence. I remember a time when I, too, fell into that trap. I wore a gold chain and a ring, symbols of status, wealth, and—supposedly—success. But one day, it hit me: what was I really gaining from wearing this gold? Did it enhance who I was as a person? Did it reflect my true worth? The answer was clear, and I discarded them both. I realized that gold, or any material possession for that matter, is just a substance—a shiny, malleable metal that has been given far more significance than it deserves.

I began telling this to those around me, especially the gold lovers who clung to it like it was an extension of their identity. "Gold is just another metal," I would say, "and if you believe it adds value to your personality, you're chasing a mirage." What truly adds value to a person is not the external embellishments, but the inner drive to excel in one's chosen field, to contribute meaningfully, and to live with purpose. When you dedicate yourself to growth and mastery, you become the gold. Your skills, your knowledge, your integrity—these are the real treasures that cannot be bought or worn.

This is a message I've shared time and again in my personality development classes across the country. We have been conditioned to believe that material possessions elevate our status, but the truth is far more profound. The value of a person isn't measured by what they wear, but by what they do and how they live. In fact, the gold we seek externally is already within us. It's found in the passion we bring to our work, the love we give to others, and the wisdom we gain through life's experiences.

I've learned that life is a journey of shedding illusions, stripping away the superficial, and discovering the essence of who we are. The sooner we let go of the unnecessary weights, the sooner we realize that we are the creators of our own value. Gold, silver, or diamonds can never reflect the true brilliance of a soul dedicated to self-mastery and meaningful contribution. True wealth is not in possessing things, but in being someone worth remembering. And that's the kind of gold that lasts forever.

“Wisemen will learn from the history; a fool will become part of it”



Ocean Currents 2.0

The Whirlpool

After completing my master's, I was promoted to 'Assistant Professor' and, after a deputation of one and a half years, I re-joined VC farm. By the time I returned, Dr. Vidyachandra, a rice breeder, had taken over as head of the Zonal Agricultural Research Station. He was an incredibly cynical person—he practically made me the subject of his own personal research. He was a classic case of a bootlicker, always trying to please his superiors while fearing those under him. His reputation for intimidation preceded him, and everyone around was on edge because of him.

He objected to almost everything I did. At one of the annual technical meetings, I questioned him about the rice variety he had developed, noting that it had a peculiar scent that seemed to reduce appetite. Rather than address the concern, he immediately dismissed me with a condescending, "You don't understand." I didn't let it slide and responded, "Science is universal. Just answer my question." Even though farmers had shared the same feedback, they still praised the variety. It was as if their admiration for their own work clouded their judgment of the science itself.

True science should be understood and respected in its original form. Sadly, they were more in love with their achievements than with upholding scientific integrity.

Many people despised Dr. Vidyachandra just as much as I did, but unlike me, they were too afraid to say it out loud. Then, one day, a scathing article about his antics appeared in the well-known weekly

magazine 'Hi Bangalore'. Because I had a reputation for being a good writer, Dr. Vidyachandra became convinced that I was the author. He pressured the university into forming a disciplinary committee to investigate.

A panel of board members, led by Dr. Prabhakar Shetty—another unscrupulous character—came to the research station to interrogate me. They fired off a series of questions, to which I calmly responded: "Go ahead, punish me—if you can prove it was me." I added that 'While I agreed with much of what had been written about Dr. Vidyachandra, I hadn't written it. I also made it clear that I had strong connections with newspaper editors and that if I had written something like that, I wouldn't hide—I would proudly put my name to it' and I continued and said 'I have certain principles and I will die with it'.

The board members, with their smug authority, hinted that I might be suspended. Smiling, I told them they were biased and had jumped to conclusions without any evidence. I warned them that if they proceeded with their baseless accusations, they would regret it. I was, in fact, turning their own threats back on them, and they backed off. In the end, nothing came of the investigation, and life went on as usual. But Dr. Vidyachandra, as expected, began scheming to set a new trap for me.

The Cowboy Again

The V.C. Farm research station had a large dairy farm, established in 1932, and its records were meticulously maintained over the years. Even as late as 2006, there were over 100 cattle. When the veterinarian in charge went on deputation for higher studies, I was unexpectedly assigned to manage the dairy, even though it wasn't my area of expertise. Since veterinary sciences, fisheries, and other animal sciences were under one umbrella, I was forced to take on this responsibility.

Though I was initially reluctant, I threw myself into the role, determined to make a difference. My brother, Dr. Ananda Murthy, who had completed his veterinary course and had already set up a veterinary medicine business near the Veterinary College in

Bangalore, offered his support. With his help, we introduced ear tagging for all the animals—a first in the farm's history. For decades, since 1962, the female calves had mysteriously been dying, but after I took charge, they began to survive. I was diligent about making surprise visits early in the morning at 5:30 a.m. and late in the evenings, drastically reducing pilferage and mismanagement.

I also allocated two acres of land to grow different varieties of fodder and implemented balanced nutrition plans for the cattle. As a result, milk production skyrocketed by 167%, and the farm's revenue followed suit.

However, the challenges didn't stop there. The maize breeders at the farm used to produce tons of maize, which was meant to be used as feed for the cattle. But there was a racket within the office system. They were billing Rs. 2.50 per kilogram for milling maize, but in reality, they were paying only 0.75 paise to the local flour mill. I confronted the miller and asked him to raise the invoice honestly for the actual amount he charged. He outright refused because he, too, was part of this corrupt network. It was a widespread racket, one that I was unwilling to let slide. My insistence on transparency exposed the underbelly of this system, but naturally, it ruffled many feathers.

Theft of Bullocks

I was scheduled to go on an official tour to Bangalore, so I left Mandya on a Sunday night. Unfortunately, while I was away, that very Sunday night, a pair of strong, well-built bullocks were stolen from the dairy. I returned on Wednesday, and the first place I headed to was the dairy, where I found an unusual scene. All the laborers were gathered in the dairy officer's chamber, and to my shock, there was an inspector sitting in my chair, smoking nonchalantly.

The moment he noticed me, he looked up and, without any respect, asked, "Who are you?" Before I could respond, my staff, who were all present, spoke in unison: "*Sahebru*—the boss." Still addressing me informally and disrespectfully, he demanded to know where I had been. His arrogance was infuriating, and I couldn't tolerate his brazen attitude. Without hesitation, I told him sternly,

“Get up from my official seat.” Then I added, “Do we sit in your chair when we visit your station?”

I quickly noticed two of our watchmen sitting nearby, bruised and visibly upset. It was clear they had been beaten. I confronted the inspector, asking why he had assaulted them. With a smug look, he replied, “If I have doubts, I’ll hit anyone—even you.”

I was outraged. “That’s not the law, you are talking to an officer” I shot back, my voice firm. The inspector seemed a bit shaken by my authority and the way I spoke to him. He hesitated, clearly realizing that he had overstepped his bounds. Feeling the pressure, he reluctantly got up from my chair and backed off. But before leaving, he met with Dr. G R Ramaswamy, the head of the station, and in a confrontational tone, issued a warning: “Don’t invite the police to this research station again.”

The entire encounter was a stark reminder of how unchecked authority can often lead to abuse, but it was also a moment where I knew I had to stand my ground, not just for my own dignity, but for the sake of the people who worked under me. Luckily, very next day, the concerned supporting staff did the searching operation and found the cattle on the Monday itself. By the time, I am back from Bangalore, the stolen cattle were there.

Vidyachandra and his gang were growing more desperate. They had convinced the university to form yet another disciplinary committee, this time headed by the comptroller, Mr. Manju. Along with him were two other members: Dr. Gubbaiah—an entomologist, known for his sadistic tendencies, and Dr. K. M. Devaraju—an agronomist, who was more of a sober figure. One day, seemingly out of the blue, Mr. Manju decided to visit Mandya and sent word that all the records be brought to him immediately.

I wasn’t going to bend to their whims. I sent a message back stating that I wouldn’t provide any information unless I was formally summoned in writing. This caused a stir among them, and soon enough, they switched from demanding to requesting me to cooperate. Mr. Manju didn’t want to make another trip for the same reason, so they called for a meeting at 3:00 pm, to which I agreed.

When the time came, I sat down in front of the committee, composed and ready for their questions. As they started their interrogation, I knew exactly how to handle the situation. Dr. Gubbaiah asked, “When were the cattle stolen?”

Without hesitation, I responded, “According to secondary information, it happened on Sunday night.”

Trying to challenge me, he said, “I say it was on Monday.”

I immediately countered, “If that’s what you’re saying, then I’ll say the cattle were not stolen at all. When I left, the cattle were there, and as far as I’m concerned, they’re still there.”

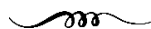
One of the other committee members couldn’t help but burst into laughter at the absurdity of the situation. But Mr. Manju, trying to maintain control, interjected firmly, “Speak properly.”

Unfazed, I calmly replied, “Just ask your questions. Don’t tell me how to speak, and don’t try to put your words into my mouth.”

I added, “I’ve said what I have to say. You could ask me a hundred questions, but my answer will remain the same.”

With that, the inquiry came to an abrupt end. As always, nothing came of it. This was just another futile attempt to trap me, one of many over the years. But each time, the truth had prevailed, and my unwavering courage and conviction in myself had seen me through every challenge. Despite their repeated efforts to bring me down, I stood strong, knowing that integrity was my shield against their petty schemes.

"I don't want to compete with anyone; I make them irrelevant-Magada"



Bangalore Chalo Again

After completing the coursework for my PhD program, I faced a decision point regarding my next steps. Instead of returning to Mandya, where I was initially stationed, I decided to move to Bangalore. My intention was to seek a transfer to the Main Research Station in Hebbal, Bangalore. This seemed like a natural progression for my career, especially with respected colleagues like Dr. Vasudevappa and Dr. Seenappa already there, both of whom were supportive of the idea. They recognized the need for a scientist in the next tier to take over key research activities, and I was eager to contribute. However, my path was not without obstacles, most notably in the form of Dr. Prabhakara Shetty, the Director of Research.

Dr. Reddy and I did not see eye to eye, and this friction wasn't entirely of my own making. It was largely due to Dr. Vidyachandra, a man I had crossed paths with previously, and Dr. Prabhakara Shetty, who shared Reddy's disdain for me. The animosity was palpable, and despite my repeated requests for a transfer, Dr. Shetty flatly refused to entertain the idea. His reasons were never made clear, but it was obvious that personal biases were at play. This wasn't just about a transfer—it was about ego and control.

Realizing that direct requests weren't getting me anywhere, I decided to take a more strategic approach. Instead of continuing to knock on Dr. Shetty's door, I turned my attention to a higher authority—the government. I drafted a formal letter to the Government of Karnataka, suggesting a significant change in the structure of the university's research and extension programs. In my letter, I proposed relocating the Directorate of Research from

Bangalore to Mandya and shifting the Directorate of Extension to Kattalagere, near Davanagere. I meticulously justified my reasoning, pointing out that farmers had to travel for over an hour just to reach Gandhi Krishi Vigyan Kendra (GKVK), the headquarters of the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore. The location, I argued, was not ideal for a state that needed more centralized access to agricultural research and services. Furthermore, I highlighted that there were sufficient field trials of commercial crops and staple foods in the proposed areas, making them better suited for the university's needs.

The letter was sent with full confidence that I was acting in the best interests of the farmers and the university. But, unsurprisingly, my actions were not well-received by the powers that be. In one of the subsequent meetings, Dr. Shetty confronted me. He was visibly angry and demanded to know why I had written to the government without first informing his office. His tone was threatening, as if my initiative to improve the university was some kind of betrayal.

I stood my ground. I calmly responded, “Why am I not allowed to think about the development of the university? If your office didn’t receive a copy of my letter, I’ll send one right now. But know this—I don’t need your permission to act in the best interests of our institution and its stakeholders. Even if a tree is cut down in New Delhi, as a responsible citizen of India, I have the right to question it.”

My response clearly took him aback. He had expected me to cower or backtrack, but instead, I met his accusations with logical reasoning and a firm sense of conviction. I saw the shift in his demeanour as he realized that I wasn’t going to be easily intimidated. He didn’t press further and left the room, likely thinking to himself that if there was one thing he could control, it would be ensuring that I never received the transfer I wanted to Bangalore.

This confrontation didn’t discourage me. In fact, it strengthened my resolve. I had faced resistance before, and I knew that standing up for what I believed in would always come with challenges. The university needed reforms, and the administration’s complacency

was holding back progress. My proposal to move the directorates wasn't about personal gain; it was about placing the resources of the university where they could do the most good. But unfortunately, those in power were more interested in maintaining the status quo than in truly improving the system.

For a while, there was tension between me and the university leadership. They viewed my actions as insubordination, but I saw it as a necessary disruption. The academic world often operates in silos, where new ideas are stifled by entrenched bureaucracies. My initiative had sparked debate and, though it didn't result in an immediate transfer, it put me on the radar as someone who wasn't afraid to challenge the system. That wasn't a position I necessarily wanted, but it was one I accepted.

Behind the scenes, my actions began to gain quiet support. There were many in the university, particularly younger faculty members, who were disillusioned by the stagnant leadership and outdated practices. They saw my efforts as a breath of fresh air, even if they weren't yet ready to openly align with me. Change, after all, rarely comes without a fight, and I had unknowingly become the face of resistance within the institution.

Meanwhile, my research continued. Despite the distractions and administrative battles, I remained committed to my work. The transfer to Bangalore was no longer my primary concern. I realized that my fight wasn't just about geography—it was about principles. Whether I was stationed in Mandya or Bangalore, my goal remained the same: to push the boundaries of agricultural science and to serve the farmers who relied on our research. I threw myself into my projects with renewed energy, knowing that in the end, it wasn't about where I worked but how I worked.

Of course, the tensions with Dr. Shetty and his allies never completely dissipated. They found ways to make my life more difficult, from denying funding requests to blocking certain research initiatives. But I had learned to navigate these obstacles with patience and strategy. I knew that real change takes time, and I wasn't about to give up on the vision I had for the university's future.

In retrospect, this period of my life taught me invaluable lessons about leadership, resilience, and the power of conviction. Standing up for what is right isn't always easy, especially when you're up against entrenched systems and personalities that thrive on control. But if there's one thing I took away from that experience, it's that courage and logic can disarm even the most formidable opponents. And while the battle for my transfer may have been lost, the war for progress in the university was far from over. In the end, I realized that the real victory wasn't in getting what I wanted—it was in becoming the kind of scientist and leader who wasn't afraid to demand more from the system, not just for myself, but for everyone who believed in a brighter future for agricultural science.

Dr. C Vasudevappa and Dr. D Seenappa had always placed great trust in my abilities. They saw the potential in my work and believed that my skills would be put to better use if I were transferred to Bangalore. This support meant a lot to me, especially coming from two respected figures in the academic community. Their belief in me was strong, and they made no secret of their desire to bring me to Bangalore, where I could contribute even more.

One day, while attending Krishi mela in Bangalore, a large agricultural fair showcasing innovations and research, a pivotal moment unfolded. Dr. Chengappa P.G., the Vice Chancellor of the university, was also present. He was known for being short in stature and even shorter in temper, often regarded as a tough, no-nonsense leader. As he toured the stalls, he visited the one I was part of, where we had put on an impressive display of our research work. To my surprise, after viewing our exhibit, he offered words of praise, acknowledging the effort we had put into it.

The atmosphere was light and positive. With everyone in a good mood, Dr. Vasudevappa, seizing the opportunity, casually proposed the idea of transferring me to Bangalore to the Vice Chancellor. But what happened next was completely unexpected.

Dr. Chengappa's attitude shifted in an instant. His face contorted with anger, and he suddenly erupted, pointing his finger at me as he spoke. "This fellow is a small politician, a goonda," he spat out with

fury. “He fears all senior officers. I will not transfer him.” His words stung, but more than that, the sheer force of his anger took me by surprise. His hostility was palpable as he continued his rant, this time turning his wrath towards Dr. Vasudevappa. “You will lose your reputation because of him!” he warned, his voice fuming with displeasure.

Despite this unexpected outburst, Dr. Vasudevappa remained composed. In a calm, measured tone, he responded, “No, sir, he is a good worker. Everyone has misunderstood him.” His defence was sincere, but it did little to quell Dr. Chengappa’s rage. The Vice Chancellor’s agitation only seemed to grow with every passing second.

As Chengappa moved away from the stall, still bristling with anger, he threw another remark over his shoulder, this time directly at Vasudevappa. “You are proposing an official matter in the wrong place and for the wrong person,” he sneered, his voice dripping with contempt. Then, in a seemingly strange twist, he smiled briefly before telling Vasudevappa to meet with him at a later time for a more “leisurely” conversation. It was as if the storm had passed, but there was an eerie sense that something else was brewing.

Just when I thought the ordeal was over, Dr. Chengappa walked a few more steps before turning back towards me. In a sharp, authoritative tone, he commanded, “Do not contest the staff election.” The order was as clear as it was unexpected. Without waiting for a response, he swiftly moved on to visit the other stalls, leaving a trail of confusion and tension in his wake.

I stood there, still processing what had just transpired. It was clear to me that the Vice Chancellor had no intention of transferring me to Bangalore anytime soon. His outburst and sharp remarks were not only a public dressing-down but also a thinly veiled threat. The command not to contest the staff election made it even clearer—he was intent on blocking my progress and keeping me from gaining any influence within the university.

Yet, amid the shock and tension of the moment, I also realized something else. Despite his anger, Dr. Chengappa’s actions revealed

that I was on his radar, and in some way, I had made an impact. The fact that he felt the need to single me out so publicly showed that I was not someone he could easily ignore or dismiss. And although his words were harsh and his tone threatening, I sensed that this confrontation, rather than marking the end of my ambitions, might instead signal a new beginning.

Dr. Chengappa's outburst had exposed the complex politics at play within the university. His resistance to my transfer wasn't merely about my performance or reputation—it was part of a larger web of personal rivalries, power struggles, and entrenched hierarchies. And while I didn't have all the answers at that moment, one thing became clear: I would need to tread carefully but with determination if I was going to navigate this tricky landscape and continue making progress in my career.

As I reflected on the incident later that day, I felt a mixture of frustration and resolve. It was disheartening to see how personal biases and grudges could hinder professional growth, but at the same time, it reminded me of the importance of resilience. I knew that challenges like these were inevitable in any career, especially when dealing with people in positions of power. But I also knew that I had the ability to rise above them, just as I had done in the past.

In the days that followed, I continued my work as usual, keeping my head down but my eyes wide open. The Vice Chancellor's threat loomed in the back of my mind, but I was determined not to let it derail my efforts. Whether or not I would contest the staff election remained a question for another day. For now, my focus was on proving, through my work, that I was more than the labels and insults that had been hurled at me.

The AC Car

For over a year and a half, from 2006 to mid-2008, I found myself traveling daily from Bangalore to Mandya by train. The routine was grueling—each day began with early morning journeys and ended with late evening returns, but I persevered, knowing that the transfer I was waiting for would eventually come. My work and

passion for research kept me motivated, despite the exhaustion from the long commutes.

In 2008, my patience paid off when I was finally transferred to the Main Research Station in Hebbal, Bangalore. This move was the start of a transformative phase in my career, as I joined forces with two esteemed colleagues, Dr. Seenappa and Dr. Vasudevappa, to develop a unique project from the ground up. Together, we embarked on an ambitious mission to establish an ornamental fish production unit at the research station. What began as an abandoned cowshed soon became a vibrant training centre.

Renovating the cowshed was no easy task. We worked tirelessly to restore the dilapidated structure, and once the transformation was complete, we named the facility in honour of Dr. P.G. Chengappa, a well-known academic and former Vice Chancellor. Alongside this, we built a polyhouse and constructed new ponds, ensuring that the station had the infrastructure it needed to serve as a premier research and training facility.

Our efforts didn't stop with the physical transformation of the research station. Over the course of a year, we organized hundreds of training programs for farmers, teaching them the latest techniques in ornamental fish production and soil management. This initiative was met with great enthusiasm from the farming community, and the success of these programs solidified our reputation as leaders in agricultural research.

In 2009, I took my work a step further by writing proposals for several government-funded projects. One of the projects that I'm most proud of was submitted under the National Agriculture Development Program (NADP). I was awarded a substantial grant of ₹1.27 crores to work on a project titled "Reclamation of Saline and Alkaline Soils." The project was designed to address the pressing issue of degraded soils, which posed a serious challenge to farmers in several districts.

I chose 258 villages across three districts—Mandya, Shivamogga, and Chikkamagalur—as the focus of the project. Through our research, we developed a comprehensive 'Package of

Practice' aimed at rehabilitating saline and alkaline soils, which included recommendations on soil amendments, cropping patterns, and water management techniques. The team I worked with, including Dr. Venkatappa, Dr. Annappaswamy, Honnananda, Chikkanna, Pidde Swamy, Jyothi, and Ramya, was exceptional. Their dedication and hard work made the project a resounding success, and our work significantly increased my connectivity with the farming community.

In 2010, the Government of Karnataka declared a drought in the state. As part of its response, the government imposed strict restrictions on the purchase of vehicles for government projects, emphasizing that no new vehicles could be bought for the use of government officers. However, I recognized that a reliable vehicle was essential for the project, especially to transport soil samples and live specimens to and from the field laboratory.

I requested special permission to purchase a vehicle, justifying that it wasn't for the comfort of the officers but for the functioning of our mobile soil laboratory. Remarkably, the request was approved, and we acquired a 'Mahindra Xylo' —beautiful vehicle that was crucial for fieldwork. We made further modifications to the vehicle, including turning the rear section into a portable field lab and equipping it with air conditioning to preserve live specimens like fish seeds and brood fish during transport. The vehicle also came with a built-in music system, which I saw as an opportunity to screen educational films on the latest agricultural and scientific developments to farmers in rural areas during evening training sessions.

Despite the vehicle being essential to the project, it wasn't long before I attracted the attention of Mr. Manju, the comptroller, who had been waiting for an opportunity to challenge me. He issued an audit objection, claiming that ₹49,000 had to be recovered from me for installing air conditioning and a music system in the government vehicle. The objection was based on technicalities—while the assistant professor cadre wasn't supposed to fly in airplanes or have air conditioning in their offices, there was no clear rule regarding air conditioning or music systems in vehicles.

Undeterred, I responded to the audit note in my own way, with a mix of logic and clever justification. I made it clear that:

1. The air conditioning in the vehicle wasn't for the officers using it, but for the safe transport of live specimens like fish seed and brood fish, which needed to be kept at low temperatures.

2. The music system wasn't for entertainment but for educational purposes, as we used it to screen audio and video films about the latest scientific advancements to farmers during our village outreach programs.

Not long after I submitted my response, I happened to meet Mr. Manju by chance. With a wry smile, he approached me and said, "You're very smart. I thought I caught you, but you're clever." His tone was both amused and frustrated, acknowledging that my explanations had foiled his attempt to penalize me. I laughed and told him that he was welcome to try his luck again in the future. He chuckled, noting that he would soon be retiring, and the two of us went for coffee together, the tension of the audit now a thing of the past.

The experience taught me that while bureaucracy and challenges were inevitable in government service, they could be navigated with ingenuity, honesty, and a clear sense of purpose. Through it all, I remained committed to the work that mattered—serving farmers, advancing agricultural research, and finding solutions that made a real difference in the lives of rural communities.

*"I don't want you to love; but you hate me with a valid reason—Dr
Magada"*

El-Nino: The Warm Water Current

Towards the Arabian Sea

The work culture at the Main Research Station was unlike anything I had experienced before. We were a team of individuals driven by a sense of purpose, often working well beyond the typical hours—spending close to 12 hours in the office and taking assignments home. Our commitment wasn't just limited to research or technical work; we embraced every responsibility that came our way. I personally found myself cleaning toilets, painting gates and tanks, and even initiating the entire farm's gardening effort. Every week, I would water the plants, ensuring the place felt alive and welcoming.

This dedication wasn't about impressing anyone but rather transforming the space we worked in. I wanted to change not just the physical surroundings but the way people viewed me. The interactions with the farmers who visited were particularly meaningful. Each time a farmer entered my office, I made it a point to rise from my seat, greet them warmly, and provide my undivided attention. I didn't see them as mere visitors—they were my clients, and I wanted them to feel valued. I offered them tea, lunch, or whatever I could, as a small gesture of hospitality. This simple approach not only built strong connections but also increased my popularity not just within the state but across the country.

I wasn't doing this for personal gain but rather out of a deep commitment to the cause and my desire to change my image among my peers. It was essential for me to demonstrate that respect for others, no matter their status, and humility in service, can create a lasting impact. This journey of transformation wasn't something I

undertook alone. My wife, Rekha, and son, Reshi, stood by me through every challenge, offering their unconditional support. Their belief in me fuelled my determination to keep pushing forward, despite the demanding workload and the occasional criticism. Through their support, I found the strength to persevere, evolve, and succeed in making a difference.

‘Jyothi Nivas’ College

I had developed a reputation for giving engaging and thought-provoking talks, and soon I found myself being invited to deliver "Personality Development" classes at various prestigious institutions in Bangalore. Among them were Bangalore Medical College, Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences, Mount Carmel College, Jyothi Nivas College, and St. Joseph's College. Each invitation was a testament to the impact I had made, yet nothing quite prepared me for the experience I would have at Jyothi Nivas.

The day I stepped onto the stage at Jyothi Nivas College, I felt a nervous tension. The hall was magnificent, reminiscent of a grand opera theatre in London, with its three tiers of seating, a towering balcony, and a large 70mm screen that loomed behind me. The dais was imposing, and a sleek, transparent glass podium stood in front of me, leaving no room to hide. In such a setting, every movement—every subtle gesture—would be noticed, amplified by the atmosphere of anticipation. The audience, a lively crowd of young women, buzzed with excitement, celebrating something I couldn't quite identify. It wasn't the most comfortable environment, because it was full of women except me and some other guy in the control room, but I knew that I had to seize control of the room.

I began my speech, but I sensed their hesitance. There was chatter, a lack of focus in the crowd. I knew I had to shake them out of their complacency. With a sudden adjustment in my tone, I confidently declared, "You are about to listen to the most handsome man in the world for the next 45 minutes." The room erupted with oohs, aahs, and laughter, but I wasn't thrown off. Instead, I embraced the moment and continued, "I am a feminist, and I'm here to make

you believe that." The tension began to dissolve, and I felt them coming back to me, intrigued.

Testing the waters, I randomly asked the audience, "Who among you is the most beautiful girl here?" There was a brief silence, as none of them dared to answer. I leaned into that moment of hesitation and then launched into a thought-provoking point. "In the Olympics," I said, "you can compete and win every time the event is held. But in beauty pageants, once you win, you're not allowed to compete again. Doesn't that seem like an absurd game?" The room fell silent. My voice grew stronger as I emphasized my point. "Why should human beauty be judged on such a scale? Why do we allow industries like fashion and cinema to dictate what beauty is? It's utter nonsense."

I saw the looks on their faces begin to change as they took in what I was saying. "When you go back home today, tell yourself you are the most beautiful person in the world," I urged. "Yes, the world will laugh at you—but keep saying it. Say it until the world stops laughing."

That's when the applause began. It wasn't just polite applause; it was the sound of young minds waking up to the message. I had captured the mood of the room and held it tightly in my grasp. With conviction, I declared, "Inferiority complex is the deadliest disease you'll ever face. You have to kill it. Why do fairness creams sell so well in India, but not in African countries? Because here, people are plagued by a false conception of beauty."

My message was simple but firm: the idea of beauty as we know it is flawed. "In fact," I said, "the word 'beauty' should be erased from the dictionary." I moved my fingers across the crowd, pointing at random girls and saying, "You... you... and you are all beautiful." The energy in the room shifted. They no longer saw me as just a speaker; they saw me as someone who was challenging everything they had been told about beauty.

In my concluding remarks, I tied it all together with an even bolder statement. "Beauty and handsomeness don't come from appearance alone—they come from success. Sachin Tendulkar, Shah

Rukh Khan, Madhuri Dixit—they are all just regular people like you and me. What makes them stand out? Their success in their chosen fields. Success is what makes someone appear beautiful or handsome. So don't chase after looks. Chase after success, and you'll automatically become beautiful."

The crowd that had initially laughed at my claim of being the most handsome man in the world was now applauding me with genuine respect. They had stopped laughing—not because of the words themselves, but because they had sensed the conviction behind them. It was my unshakable belief in what I was saying that had won them over.

That day, I didn't just give a speech; I shared a philosophy. Beauty is not something that can be measured on a scale or decided by societal standards. It is a reflection of one's success, confidence, and self-belief. And as I left the stage, I could see in their eyes that they no longer saw beauty the same way. That's the power of conviction—when you believe in something deeply enough, the world will stop laughing and start clapping.

I leaned into the microphone, sensing that the room was now completely in tune with my message. With a steady voice, I dropped a thought-provoking statement: "There is no single author for grammar; it's merely a compilation of the most commonly used formats, and over time, it has become known as 'Grammar.' So why not write your own grammar for beauty?"

The students were hanging on every word, curious to see where I was going with this. I continued, "Don't let the world tell you what beauty is. Don't follow the grammar someone else has written for you. Create your own. Define your own standards, your own rules, your own identity. And if you ask me, don't even think about participating in a beauty pageant again."

At that moment, the room became utterly silent. The once-celebratory energy was replaced by a mix of surprise and shock. They were not expecting this. My words had hit them like a gust of cold wind, especially given what was about to happen after my speech. The organizers had planned a "Ramp Walk" immediately

after my talk, a fashion show where students would model, strutting down the stage under the critical gaze of judges. To add to the significance, someone like Prakash Padukone or another high-profile celebrity was expected to make an appearance as a guest.

The air was thick with disbelief. The audience couldn't quite reconcile my bold statements with the event that was about to unfold. They had come expecting a fun-filled, glamorous celebration of beauty, but here I was, challenging the very foundation of what they had been conditioned to accept.

Some of the students looked at each other, their faces reflecting confusion. A few whispered to their neighbours, while others simply stared at me, waiting to see what I would say next. I knew I had shaken them. I had interrupted the superficial narrative of beauty and planted the seed of a deeper conversation.

I allowed the silence to linger for a few seconds before speaking again. "I know some of you may be feeling uncomfortable right now, especially with what's coming next," I said, acknowledging the elephant in the room. "But that discomfort is important. It's the first step toward questioning what you've been told to believe your entire life. When you walk that ramp today, remember this: Your worth isn't tied to the way you look under those lights. It's tied to the person you are inside, to the success you achieve in your life, and to the way you define your own beauty, your own identity."

The shock in the room hadn't dissipated, but now there was a deeper sense of reflection. The glamour of the ramp walk, which had seemed so exciting just moments ago, suddenly felt trivial in comparison to the weight of the words I had just spoken. I could see the gears turning in their minds as they began to process what beauty really meant—and what it didn't.

In challenging the status quo, I had disrupted the narrative, and for a moment, the spotlight wasn't on the glitz of the upcoming ramp walk or the celebrity guest—it was on the power of self-worth and the idea of creating one's own rules in a world that is all too eager to impose its own.

And in that moment, I knew I had left an impression that would linger long after the fashion show was over.

As soon as my talk concluded, the college management stepped up to honour me. It was a formal gesture, but there was something more electric in the air—something I hadn't fully anticipated. As I began to make my way back through the aisle between the two seating segments, I felt the weight of hundreds of eyes on me, but it wasn't just the usual polite interest. It was something deeper, more engaged. To my surprise, the girls were leaning over from their seats, eagerly extending their hands to shake mine. One by one, they reached out, their faces bright with newfound respect and admiration. It was as if my words had triggered a shift in their perception, and now they wanted to connect—not just with the speaker who had stirred their thoughts but with the philosophy I had shared.

This continued all the way until I reached the exit of the auditorium. Hands kept coming, and I responded to each one, knowing that for them, it wasn't just about the handshake. It was about affirming their own worth in a world that often told them otherwise. They weren't simply acknowledging me; they were, in a way, acknowledging the beauty in themselves that I had encouraged them to see.

As I neared the exit, the principal—a nun, modest and serene in her presence—came up to me. She smiled warmly, her eyes sparkling with a mixture of admiration and perhaps a little amusement. “You’ve truly mesmerized our girls,” she said. “For the first time, I have ever witnessed such silence in this auditorium.”

Her words struck me. The silence she spoke of wasn't just the absence of noise; it was the silence of deep reflection, a stillness that signified that something profound had settled in. It was as though my words had reached a part of their consciousness that most of them had never explored before. The usual chatter, laughter, and frivolous distractions had been replaced by introspection, and that, to me, was a greater reward than any applause.

The principal then gently asked, “Would you like to stay and watch the fashion show?”

For a brief moment, I was tempted. After all, the allure of seeing the vibrant energy of the event, the enthusiasm of the students, and, of course, the beautiful girls on stage was hard to resist. But I had already made a stand. I had spoken against the very concept of such beauty pageants, calling them a “nonsense game.” If I stayed now, I would betray the principles I had so passionately defended just moments before.

With a smile, I politely declined. “No, thank you,” I said. “As much as I would like to, I must stick to my own words. I’ve already made my statement, and it wouldn’t feel right to stay.”

She nodded, understanding the importance of integrity and standing by one’s convictions. There was a shared respect in that moment, as if she, too, appreciated that my refusal was not out of disinterest but out of principle.

As I moved on, away from the auditorium, I felt a sense of fulfilment, not just because I had been honoured by the college or because the students had shown me such admiration. It was deeper than that. I had planted a seed—a seed of self-worth and confidence in a world that constantly tries to dictate what beauty is. By turning down the opportunity to stay for the fashion show, I had shown them that standing by your beliefs is just as important, if not more, than making them in the first place.

In life, we’re often presented with moments that test our principles. It’s easy to be swayed by the glamour, the attention, or the desire to fit in. But true strength lies in staying the course, even when the temptation to stray is strong. Beauty, success, and self-worth are not things handed to you by society’s standards. They are things you define for yourself, and once you understand that, the world’s approval becomes secondary.

As I walked away from the event, I carried with me a sense of peace, knowing that I had stayed true to my word. That, in itself, was the real victory. I didn’t need to watch the show to understand that

beauty wasn't on that ramp—it was in the confidence, courage, and authenticity of every individual who dared to define it for themselves.

Entry of Rajanna: 420

The number 420 didn't mean that Rajanna was a shady character; it just happened to be his Identity Card number from college. In fact, Rajanna was a simple, straightforward person—honest to a fault. He had this unique ability to say exactly what was on his mind without considering the consequences. That's just how he was.

On a regular day, probably the 28th of December 2010, Dr. Narasimha Murthy, a scientist working at ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology in Cochin, came to visit me at my office. It was a pleasant and casual meeting, as we often had when exchanging ideas. Rajanna, who had a deep admiration for both of us, suddenly showed up at around 5:30 PM to catch up. Myself and Honnananda were busy with some tasks at that moment, fully engrossed in our work.

As soon as Rajanna walked in, with his usual directness, he blurted out, "Sir, why are you wasting your time here? You should apply for the professor position at the Veterinary University in Bidar." I was completely unaware of this opportunity. I immediately asked Rajanna for a photograph to keep in my pocket as a lifelong reminder of his help. He gladly gave it to me, and to this day, his photo remains in my wallet alongside my mother's.

To my surprise, my friends who were already working at the Veterinary University hadn't mentioned anything about the opening. When I called them to ask why they hadn't informed me, they simply said, "You're doing great where you are, so we thought you might not be interested." It was a classic case of smart escapism—an excuse I couldn't argue against. Then I realized *'It's okay to call people colleagues, classmates, schoolmates, or neighbours—not everyone is a 'friend'. It is a strong word; we must use it wisely.*

At that point, I had only 72 hours left before the application deadline. Time was ticking fast, and there was a lot to do. I needed to prepare my biodata according to the university's specific format, get the necessary approvals from my current workplace, and ensure

that the documents reached Bidar—900 km away from Bangalore—all within those three days.

That night, Honna, who was usually calm and not overly concerned with deadlines, worked tirelessly alongside me. It was probably the only time I had ever seen him so serious about completing a task. Together, we got the biodata ready, and everything was finalized on a fast-track basis. Early the next day, we obtained the required approvals from the university and immediately sent one of my field assistants on the long journey to Bidar to submit the application in person.

I didn't take any chances—I applied for all three professor positions: Aquatic Biology, Oceanography, and Marine Biology. It was a whirlwind of effort and coordination, but we managed to pull it off in record time.

Looking back, the whole experience was a mixture of urgency and teamwork, with Rajanna's casual remark triggering a chain of events that would have otherwise passed me by. His candidness, which some might dismiss as blunt, turned out to be a critical moment in my career. And Honna's dedication that night showed me that, under pressure, we are all capable of surprising ourselves.

A few months later, as the interview letters rolled in, I found myself in a peculiar position—everyone who had applied for the professor positions received their call letters, except me. Time was running out, and there was barely a week left before the scheduled interviews. My anxiety mounted when I found out that the screening committee had rejected my application. Their reason? They claimed I wasn't eligible because my specialization was in aquaculture, not marine biology.

What frustrated me even more was that there was already someone working with a specialization in aquaculture. The irony was not lost on me, and it felt like a blatant double standard. I decided to take a chance and visit the university in person, hoping to appeal their decision. But the reception I got was cold and dismissive, as if my concerns were of no importance. At that moment, all my hope began to slip away. It felt like I had hit a dead end.

Enter the Red Fort—the High Court

Casually, I decided to drop by the Veterinary Surgery Department, where my close friend Dr. P.T. Ramesh worked. Ramesh and I had become good friends thanks to my brother, who was his senior during their university days. After explaining my predicament, Ramesh, with his usual nonchalant wisdom, said, "Why don't you approach the court?" It was an idea that hadn't even crossed my mind. He then gave me the reference of Mr. Bagavath, a well-known lawyer based in Malleshwaram, Bangalore. Ramesh warned me, though, that Bagavath was known to charge exorbitant fees. When I expressed my surprise at the potential costs, Ramesh even offered to lend me some money to cover the expenses.

Though I didn't take his money, his words gave me the courage to pursue the legal route. I headed straight to Mr. Bagavath's office, hopeful that he could help. Upon hearing my story, he pulled out a few papers and began explaining where I needed to sign. I instinctively took out my pen, ready to move forward. But suddenly, he stopped me and said, "Not now. First, pay the fee." My hand froze in mid-air. It was a stark reminder that nothing in this world comes without a price, especially justice.

Feeling deflated, I returned home, wondering how I was going to gather the required amount. Early the next morning, after managing to arrange the money, I paid him in cash, and my case was officially filed in the high court. Soon after, I received an interim court order allowing me to attend the interview. It felt like a small victory amidst the chaos.

With the court order in hand, I arrived for the interview. Outside the interview chamber was a screening committee tasked with verifying documents. Dr. Yathiraj-the then Dean of Veterinary College, Bangalore, who chaired the committee, took one look at my meticulously prepared biodata and remarked, "Dr. Shivakumar, your biodata is impeccably designed. I like it." For a fleeting moment, I thought I had made an impression. But then he followed with, "Unfortunately, we're rejecting your candidature."

Despite the stinging rejection, I didn't let it rattle me. I simply smiled and proceeded with the formalities. There was something about that moment—perhaps it was the realization that, no matter the setbacks, I had fought hard to be there. I had challenged the system, stood up for my rights, and whether I succeeded or not, I wasn't going to let this battle define me. The process, the fight, and the courage to stand up were victories in themselves.

I presented all the necessary documents and evidence to substantiate my claims, leaving no room for doubt that I was right. However, the university, under the influence of higher powers, constituted a committee to review my case. The committee was chaired by Dr. K.M. Shankar, the Dean, and included Dr. N.S. Sudhakar, Professor of Fish Processing Technology, and Dr. M.N. Venugopal, Professor of Microbiology as its members. All of these individuals, despite their qualifications and stature, were working under the sway of the Vice Chancellor Dr Suresh Honnappgol and Dr. HRV Reddy, who was the Director of Research at the time.

Dr. Reddy happened to be from the same department I was aspiring to join. Although we had no personal rivalry, forces beyond our immediate control were at play. There were people, some of whom were once close to me, who did not wish to see my academic career progress. They saw my ambition as a threat, and unfortunately, they found an easy instrument in Dr. Reddy to further their agenda. He, perhaps unknowingly, became the brass ears for those who sought to undermine me, and my own friends took full advantage of this vulnerability.

In the end, the committee rejected my plea, stating that my specialization in aquaculture placed me in a different department and thus, I was not eligible for the position. It was a crushing blow, but the situation was far from over. I could sense the undercurrents of politics that had worked against me. It wasn't just a matter of eligibility; it was a matter of keeping me out of a system that didn't want change, or perhaps feared it.

But karma has its way of evening the scales. What goes around eventually comes back around. The very same people who

orchestrated my rejection, especially Dr. Shankar, soon felt the bite of the same snake they had set loose on me. They, too, became victims of the same politics and intrigue that they had turned a blind eye to earlier. It was as if fate was teaching them a lesson. When you see a fire catch hold of a neighbouring house, you cannot afford to be careless. If you do, sooner or later, that fire will find its way to your home as well.

In the end, it wasn't just about my rejection or my struggles; it was about how short-sightedness and self-serving behaviour can have far-reaching consequences. The very people who helped pull me down eventually faced the same kind of sabotage and betrayal. They, too, became entangled in the very web they had spun to trap me. It was a lesson in humility, and a reminder that, in life, what we do—whether good or bad—always comes back to us.

After the ordeal in Bidar, Dr. Shankar travelled to Bangalore and stayed at a guest house. I decided to meet him there, and during our conversation, he confided in me, explaining that he and the committee were helpless in the face of the larger forces at play. He hinted at the political nexus behind my rejection, but I could tell he was being careful not to reveal too much. Despite the pressure from various sides, I didn't hold any grudge against him or the committee. I knew they had made a decision that followed the established guidelines. My real issue wasn't with them; it was with the guidelines themselves—the system that was set up to prevent someone like me from progressing.

Later that evening, we went out for dinner. Dr. Shankar, expecting me to be frustrated or angry, was visibly surprised by how calm and composed I was. It was as if the rejection had no effect on me at all. At one point, he looked at me and said, "*Aagabahudu marayre*"—a phrase in Kannada that loosely translates to, "I like it." He then added, "I appreciate your courage."

We spent the dinner discussing various possibilities of how I could still make my way to the college as a professor, even though the odds seemed stacked against me. Dr. Shankar was practical, and as the evening went on, he offered his perspective. "Shivakumar, just

leave it. You're happy here in Bangalore. Why not stay where you are?" His words were well-meaning; he wanted to see me comfortable, avoiding further stress and struggle.

I smiled, and with confidence, I replied, "I will meet you soon at Mangalore, sir." There was something in my voice, a sense of certainty that seemed to catch him off guard again. He looked at me once more, almost in disbelief, and repeated, "*Aagabahudu marayre.*" It was as though he couldn't quite understand my optimism and resilience and he continued to stay blank as ever.

Dr. Shankar's suggestion to leave it all behind was logical from his perspective. After all, why would someone continue to pursue a battle that seemed so difficult, so mired in politics and bureaucracy? But for me, it was never about giving up. I knew that no matter how many obstacles were placed in front of me, I had the will to move forward. The quiet confidence I displayed wasn't just for show; it was born from years of facing challenges head-on. I understood that setbacks were only temporary, and I had faith that 'my claims are right' and my perseverance would eventually pay off.

Dr. Shankar's final words stayed with me, not as a suggestion to back down, but as an acknowledgment of my resolve. While he was offering a practical solution, I was determined to take a different path, one that would lead me to where I truly belonged.

Meeting the opponent lawyer

I told my advocate that I will meet the lawyer who was defending the university. He was wild and blasted me when I said it. In fact it was an insult for my advocate. But, out of curiosity, without intimating my lawyer, I met advocate—one *who was defending the university* at his office. He charged me in his own language for going to his office without an appointment. I just folded my hand to respect him and told him politely 'Not to change his argument and his strategy; but to read my biodata'. He said 'he does not have time to read all that *purana*—the junk—he *meant*, and asked to me go. I left his office with a humiliation. Few weeks later, someone called me from his office for some clarification and asked me to visit his office. I could not go on the said date. It ended abruptly.

Judgement Day

The court ruled in my favour, but the final approval still needed to come from the Board of Management. On December 24, 2011, the board officially approved my candidacy. I was waiting outside on the lawns of the veterinary college, accompanied by Rajanna, Nanjundappa, and a few others. When I heard the news, I was overwhelmed with happiness. Without delay, I headed straight to Mandya to share the good news with everyone, and then to Somanathapura to celebrate with my wife.

I submitted my resignation to UAS, Bangalore, and was officially relieved of my duties on January 3, 2012. During the farewell, emotions ran high, and I found myself deeply moved, just like everyone else. Leaving the Main Research Station was incredibly painful. I had invested my blood, sweat, and tears into that place. Every stone, every plant—there was an undeniable connection I had formed over the years, and saying goodbye felt like leaving a part of myself behind. Started my journey towards Mangalore again.

After my appointment, while attending to some other matters at Bangalore, I happened to meet the opposing advocate—the one representing the university—at his office. He was a man of quiet yet commanding presence. To my surprise, he had thoroughly reviewed my biodata, something I hadn't expected. His words were unexpected but comforting, like a warm breeze on a cold day.

"We were merely playing with the wording in the job announcement," he admitted. "The university was trying to keep the best candidate from getting through. But in the end, you've succeeded. I don't feel like I've lost in this case because you truly deserved it. You've got a bright future ahead of you, and you're going to go far," he smiled like endorsing his own statement.

A sense of relief washed over me. I smiled, thanked him, and was about to leave when his voice turned firm, almost business-like. "You need to pay the fee."

I was caught off guard, completely unprepared for that. But before panic could set in, he burst into a warm laugh, the kind that eases tension immediately. "I noticed in your biodata that you're a

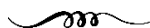
singer,” he said with a soft smile. “Why don’t you sing for me? I’m terribly stressed today. Come on, lighten my day.”

The request was unexpected, yet sincere. So, I sat down and began singing Dr. G. S. Shivarudrappa's poem, "*Ello Hudukide...Illada Devara, Kallu MaNNugaLa GuDiyoLage...*" —it translates to “I found the elusive god in the mud and stones, but failed to see the love that exists right here among us.” The song filled the room, echoing deep with meaning. As I sang, I noticed his head lowered, and his eyes filled with tears. He was silently crying, a man so strong and composed now visibly touched. My own eyes welled up as the song reached its final notes.

For a moment, there was only silence, the kind that binds people together without a word needing to be spoken. He finally looked up, wiping his tears, and said softly, “You may go now... You will win, definitely. You will win... All the best.”

Many years later, he became an hon’ble judge in the High Court of Karnataka and still continuing. He is known for his sharp mind and bold decisions. But I’ll always remember that day, the unexpected moment of shared emotion between an opponent advocate and a client united through the emotions of the song and sincerity. Recently, he stated in court, “Where will these poor people go if you commit injustice? The court will not tolerate it.” He was referring to the unfair selection of a candidate. He has become firm in taking action against those who manipulate the process based on their whims to prevent someone from being selected.

*“Oh! God, please protect me from my friends; I will take care my enemies
—Dr Magada”*



La-Nino: The Cold Water Current

Back to the Shores of Arabian Sea: A Tale of Winds, Waves, and Will

On the 4th of January 2012, I arrived in Mangalore with a mix of anticipation and resolve. I stayed at the Mangala, the college guest house, where my mind was preoccupied with the next chapter of my professional journey. The following day, I reported for duty to Dr. Shankar, K M., who was the Dean at the time. I was assigned to the Department of Aquatic Environment Management, and it was here that I encountered my first real challenge. The Head of the Department was Dr. Gangadhara Gowda—a man who, despite his position, was essentially a puppet, completely under the influence of Dr. HRV Reddy, a senior figure in the university’s hierarchy.

From the very beginning, the atmosphere was not conducive to the kind of professional environment I had envisioned. I was shown a workspace in the common area, a shared space that was hardly suitable for a professor of my stature. I was, after all, the first professor in the department to be appointed through direct selection, while the others had been promoted to their positions. By university principles, I should have been the senior-most faculty member, but that was far from the reality. The system had been manipulated to favour the majority, and seniority was disregarded to benefit others.

On that very first day, I made my stance clear. I refused to accept the substandard treatment and boldly declared, “I won’t even leave

my chappals here,” implying that I wouldn’t tolerate disrespect or accept a lesser status than I deserved. Dr. Gowda, with his typical bland and unnecessary smile, tried to downplay the situation. He wore a façade of politeness, perhaps thinking he could buy time or make me reconsider, but I wasn’t one to be swayed so easily. I decided to give him some time to rethink his approach, though I had little hope that he would challenge the status quo.

What I found particularly unsettling was the situation regarding the faculty. A woman who had once been my student, and who was three cadres below me in rank, was occupying the professor’s room. She was part of the Fisheries Resources Management department, yet she was seated in a space designated for someone of my rank. Worse still, two associate professors were relegated to sitting in the common hall. The professor’s room, which should have been rightfully mine, had been repurposed as the “Regional Office for the Director of Research,” and she was essentially functioning as his assistant.

It became apparent that the faculty members, including my juniors, were too afraid to question this arrangement. They were either blackmailed into silence or too intimidated to raise any objections. The university, or rather those in control, had created an environment where dissent was stifled, and those in positions of power could bend the rules to their advantage. It was a disheartening situation, one that went against every principle of fairness and academic integrity.

As I took in the reality of my new workplace, I realized that this was going to be a battle, not just against individuals but against an entire system that thrived on favouritism and manipulation. The challenges ahead were clear, but so was my determination. I had fought too hard to get here, and I wasn’t about to back down now.

For the first fifteen days, I spent most of my time in the library, waiting for clarity on my role and responsibilities. During that period, one of the board members, Mr. Vasudev Byndoor, who was closely aligned with my opponents, approached me. He informed me that I would be given a separate chamber in the basement of the

library. Without hesitation, I refused the offer. I knew that this was an attempt to sideline me, to make me invisible within the university. Sensing my resolve, within just fifteen days, they constructed a "Sheesh Mahal"—a glass-enclosed office space in the basement of the library. The woman who had been occupying my rightful place was moved there. Interestingly, she was more arrogant and headstrong than even the Director of Research himself, a key figure behind much of the politics at play.

On the second day of my tenure, January 5th, 2012, Dr. Gowda convened a staff meeting. The primary agenda was the redistribution of courses among the faculty. Dr. Ganapathi Naik, in an almost strategic move, suggested that I take on some of his credits, stating that he didn't have enough teaching experience. His suggestion was transparent; it was clear that he was trying to transfer the burden onto me. During the discussion, Dr. Mridula, another faculty member, asked whether I had ever taught her. When Ganapathi had taught her, I had also been teaching canning technology at the same time. I simply told her to check her records if she had any doubts. I didn't feel the need to assert my authority or take pride in having taught her.

However, I couldn't let Dr. Ganapathi's comment slide so easily. I asked him about his specialization, and he replied confidently, "Oceanography." I smiled knowingly and told him to rethink his answer—it was actually "Freezing Technology." I gently reminded him to focus on his own career, hinting that he should be cautious in how he managed his professional trajectory. My remark seemed to make him uneasy, as he appeared tense throughout the rest of the meeting. A few months later, he took transfer to the Department of Aquaculture, a decision that further validated my earlier comment.

My arrival at the university had clearly unsettled many, even those who had once been close to me. Some of my friends, including those I had considered allies, were uncomfortable with my appointment. *"I can handle being hated, but what I can't stand is the pretence of love."* The atmosphere was rife with tension. Rumours started circulating, with some even comparing my situation to that of Dr. Saravanan, a former Assistant Professor who had been

removed from his post after just one year due to a technical error in his selection process. One of my close friends pointed this out, suggesting that I might meet the same fate.

Despite the undercurrents of hostility and opposition, I remained calm. The politics didn't surprise me, nor did the attempts to undermine my position. It was clear that my presence had disrupted the status quo, and that discomfort was manifesting in various ways. However, I wasn't one to be easily intimidated. I had come this far through determination, and I knew that these early challenges were just the beginning of a larger battle.

As time went on, I began to establish myself within the university and took on a wide range of academic responsibilities. Slowly but steadily, I initiated a total of 21 different activities, all for the first time in the college's history. Among these was the celebration of 'World Environment Day' in my department, which has since become an annual tradition and continues to run successfully to this day. I poured my energy into these initiatives, believing in their long-term value and the impact they could have on the academic culture.

However, not everyone appreciated my efforts. Some of my colleagues, even friends, openly objected to the work I was doing. They didn't understand why I felt the need to take on so much. In fact, there were times when I stopped, thinking perhaps I was pushing too hard. Yet, interestingly, when I paused, none of them took the initiative to continue those activities. That was the prevailing culture—a reluctance to go beyond the bare minimum, a tendency to maintain the status quo. It was disheartening to see such resistance to progress.

Despite this, I remained undeterred. I went on to conduct a 'Winter School,' organized a national workshop titled 'Bridging the Yield Gap in Fisheries and Aquaculture' (BYGFISH 1.0), and even launched the 'Blue Fish Forum' in Bangalore. These events attracted attention and were well-received within academic circles. I also facilitated numerous training programs and was invited to speak at almost every institute in the Mangalore region.

In all of this, I was careful to create my own space and opportunities without stepping on anyone's toes. I wasn't looking to outshine others or prove myself at the cost of my colleagues. My goal was simple: to contribute meaningfully to the institution and the field. But as I continued to achieve success after success, I began to understand a deeper truth—too much winning can also become a weakness.

It wasn't that I regretted my accomplishments, but I realized that constant victory can alienate those around you. In a space where many prefer to stay within their comfort zones, too much ambition can unsettle people. My achievements, while fulfilling, also served as a mirror to others' inaction, and that created friction. In the end, I came to accept that progress often comes with its own set of challenges, not just from the work itself but from the environment and the people who surround you.

Mathsyamela 2.0

I was deeply involved with the Department of Fisheries, Government of Karnataka, in organizing 'Mathsyamela-2011' at Palace Grounds, Bangalore. The entire concept, including the exhibition stalls and the tunnel aquarium, was my brainchild. The event turned out to be a huge success, drawing a record 6.0 lakh visitors over the span of three days. My classmate, Dinesh, who was the Director of the Department of Fisheries, and I played key roles in making this happen.

Initially, the Karnataka Fisheries Development Corporation (KFDC) had allocated Rs. 40.0 lakh for organizing 'Mathsyamela,' but despite the budget, they were struggling to execute the event. This issue was raised during a discussion in the office of Dean Dr. Shankar. Seizing the opportunity, I boldly stated, "We will organize it." Dr. Shankar, a laid-back and research-focused person, gave his approval with a simple, "If you can do it, go ahead."

The very next day, I travelled to Bangalore to meet Mr. Veerappa Gowda, the Director of Fisheries, and completed all the necessary formalities. I then wrote a letter to the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) in Hyderabad, requesting an additional

Rs. 20.0 lakh for the event. They responded promptly and approved the funds without hesitation, paving the way for the successful execution of 'Mathsyamela-2011.'

Deputy Commissioner's Warning

To ensure that all the relevant developmental departments were involved in the planning of 'Mathsyamela,' a meeting was convened with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Dakshina Kannada, Adoor B. Ibrahim. He was known for his calm attitude and no-nonsense attitude. The meeting included representatives from 21 developmental departments, and I was tasked with briefing everyone about the grand vision I had for the event.

After I finished explaining, DC Ibrahim calmly suggested holding the event at Nehru Maidan, a large open cricket ground in the heart of the city, instead of the more sophisticated TMA Pai Convention Hall, which I had originally chosen. His suggestion completely took me by surprise, as the scale and sophistication I envisioned for 'Mathsyamela-2016' required a more formal, structured venue. The rustic outdoor cricket ground seemed too basic and inappropriate for the event's ambitious scope.

I tried to explain my reasoning to him, starting with, "Sir, you don't understand..." Before I could continue, the DC's calm demeanour shifted. He interrupted me sharply and said, "Yes, we don't understand. Do it by yourself then." His tone was laced with irritation, and with that, he abruptly cancelled the meeting. The room quickly emptied, leaving me standing there, stunned at how quickly the situation had escalated. The support I had hoped for from the district administration had crumbled before my eyes.

This, combined with the lukewarm response from my own college, created a significant roadblock. When I returned to the campus, Dr. Shankar, the dean, was concerned about the lack of backing from the administration. He suggested cancelling the entire event, sensing that without proper governmental support, the task was becoming too difficult to manage.

But I refused to back down. "No," I said firmly. I had already committed too much to this project, and I wasn't going to let a

setback deter me. I knew that this event had the potential to be a massive success, and despite the challenges, I was determined to see it through. This was more than just another event for me—it was a symbol of progress, innovation, and collaboration, something that would leave a lasting impact on the region's fisheries and aquaculture industry.

The path forward wasn't going to be easy, but I was ready to navigate the obstacles, no matter how daunting they seemed.

I was confident from the beginning that I could handle the enormous responsibility of organizing the mega event, 'Mathsyamela.' I was determined to make it a grand success, despite the earlier setbacks. Following all the necessary procedures and working tirelessly, the event was conducted on a grand scale.

It featured a variety of exciting activities: a marathon that drew participants from all over, an aqua-scaping competition showcasing the art of aquatic design, a recipe competition where culinary enthusiasts displayed their skills with seafood, and an angling contest for fishing aficionados. The highlight of the event was the grand exhibitions of ornamental fishes and sea shells, which mesmerized visitors. Stalls from both academic institutions and private enterprises contributed to the educational and commercial aspect of the event, making it truly multifaceted.

The turnout was overwhelming. People lined up for over a kilometer just to enter the venue, and more than one lakh visitors attended the event over the course of its duration. The 'Mathsyamela' became the talk of the town, and for days after, people were buzzing with excitement about what they had experienced. The media played a crucial role in amplifying the success of the event, with all major outlets covering it extensively. The sheer scale and vibrancy of the event left a lasting impression on everyone involved.

The most remarkable moment, however, came late in the evening. At around 10:00 PM, the Deputy Commissioner, Adoor B. Ibrahim, visited the event with his family. I could sense his amazement as he walked around, taking in the sights and atmosphere. After touring the entire setup, he called me over and

said, “Shivanna... You have created a wonderful world. Yes, you told me long ago that I didn’t understand. You were right. I didn’t realize that a fisheries show could be such a grand affair... Congratulations.”

His words held a deep sense of appreciation and acknowledgment. The very same person who had once doubted the scale and potential of the event was now praising it in front of everyone. It felt like a full-circle moment—a validation of my vision and hard work. From that day forward, the DC quoted my name in various instances, using my efforts as an example of innovation and determination for all the right reasons.

The success of 'Mathsyamela' was more than just a career milestone for me; it became a symbol of what can be achieved when determination, creativity, and resilience come together to overcome even the strongest skepticism. It was an opportunity to not only showcase the immense potential of the fisheries sector but also to challenge the boundaries of what others believed possible. The event stood as a testament to the idea that with vision and perseverance, one could turn even the most abstract dreams into tangible realities.

However, with great success often comes unforeseen consequences. I never anticipated that the very people who stood by my side in the early days would eventually harbour so much envy and resentment towards me. The irony was not lost on me; while I was celebrating the collective success of the sector and the event, they were silently nurturing jealousy, clouded by their own insecurities.

Just a few months before Mathsyamela, I purchased a new EcoSport vehicle. It was a personal decision, something that symbolized my hard-earned progress. Yet, to my surprise, this innocuous purchase became the subject of endless gossip and innuendo. Many, with a hint of mockery, would say, "Oh, it's the vehicle you bought with the money made from the mela, isn't it?" They would chuckle, making light of their baseless suspicions, while I smiled and let their words drift away. Little did I realize that beneath the surface of these jokes was a growing bitterness that they didn’t care to hide anymore.

I soon came to understand that while I was busy working, planning, and building, they were doing their own form of "research"—not on how to improve themselves, but on dissecting my life. They were not focused on their own growth or their own journey; instead, they were consumed with finding flaws, real or imagined, in mine. It was a subtle yet painful lesson about human nature. As much as people admire success from a distance, proximity can breed discomfort, envy, and even hatred.

Philosophically, it made me reflect deeply on how we measure success and the impact it has on others. When we strive to break barriers, it can unsettle those who are comfortable within the confines of mediocrity. My friends, who once shared the same aspirations, seemed to forget their own dreams as they focused more on what I was achieving. This is a common paradox in life—when one person rises, others may either be inspired to follow or be pulled down by their own sense of inadequacy.

In moments like these, I realized the importance of focusing on one's own path, regardless of the noise around. Success is a deeply personal journey, and the external validation or criticism should never be the compass by which we navigate our course. What others thought or said about my achievements was irrelevant, because the value of my work, my dedication, and my integrity were things that only I could truly measure.

It became clear to me that people often project their own insecurities onto others. They tend to criticize and belittle what they cannot achieve or understand themselves. My new vehicle, my role in 'Mathsyamela,' my efforts—they were not the real source of their frustration. Rather, it was their own sense of stagnation, their inability to push beyond their comfort zones, that caused the bitterness.

So, while I continued to work and evolve, I also learned the importance of detachment. Not from people, but from the need for external validation. Success, I realized, isn't just about reaching goals; it's about remaining true to yourself despite the opinions of others. It's about walking your path with humility, even when faced

with jealousy or doubt. And ultimately, it's about understanding that the only person you need to impress is the one looking back at you in the mirror. Many were seriously enquiring about my tour, my network, net worth, and strategy and trying find the faults. I was determined to go on as long as I am doing good to the institute.

Those who focus on tearing others down forget the most important truth: in doing so, they tear themselves down even more. While they were busy researching my "biography," they had stopped writing their own.

The Rough Roads to KVK

In 2016, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) on the campus was facing a transition after the retirement of Dr. Hanumanthappa, who had been in charge. Given my extensive experience in extension work at UAS, Bangalore, I was asked to take on the additional responsibility of overseeing the KVK. I willingly agreed, seeing it as another opportunity to bring about positive change. The first thing I noticed was the state of neglect. The entire campus, including the office premises, had been left unattended for years. It was overrun with weeds, and the open well was so filled with silt and overgrown that cattle could walk across it as if it were solid ground. It was a sad reflection of how little care had been given to a place that had so much potential.

Without delay, I rolled up my sleeves and set to work. The entire campus was cleaned, the well was restored, and the old British-era sheds were repainted, giving them new life. The dairy, which resembled a slum, was renovated to proper standards. Each of the animals was tagged, and everything was brought up to a level of order and efficiency that had been long absent. The polyhouse and vermicompost units, both essential to the KVK's operations, were repaired and made functional again.

Beyond just fixing what was broken, I introduced several programs that had never been implemented before. One of the major achievements was securing a research project from the Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, focused on the ambitious goal of 'Doubling the Farmers' Income.' This project was not only timely

but also critical for improving the livelihoods of farmers in the region. The KVK, which had been a quiet corner of the campus, suddenly found itself in the spotlight. Our extension and outreach activities gained attention, and soon, the KVK became a hub of activity and progress.

As the revenue for the KVK increased exponentially, we were able to bring in new farm equipment and upgrade the laboratories, allowing us to offer more sophisticated and valuable services to the farmers. It was a remarkable turnaround, and the KVK became a model of what could be achieved through dedication, hard work, and a clear vision.

However, this newfound success didn't go unnoticed, especially among my colleagues at the college. Before I took charge of the KVK, most of them hadn't paid much attention to what was happening there. But now that it was thriving, they began to take an interest—not in the success, but in scrutinizing my every move. Many of them had little to occupy their time and instead chose to act as "Cross Fertilization Officers," informally spreading rumours and gathering gossip about what I was doing at the KVK.

Their behaviour was a clear reflection of a deeper issue. Rather than focusing on their own work, they had become more invested in following my activities. Perhaps they felt threatened for no reason by the progress I was making, or maybe it was jealousy over the attention the KVK was now receiving. Whatever their motivations, I couldn't allow their petty games to distract me from my larger purpose. While they were busy trying to undermine or monitor my work through their informants, I remained focused on the mission at hand: improving the lives of farmers and revitalizing the KVK.

In a way, this situation highlighted a broader truth about success. When you're working hard to achieve something meaningful, there will always be those who seek to bring you down, often out of their own insecurity or boredom. But the key is to stay true to your purpose and not get drawn into their negativity. For me, the real reward wasn't in gaining recognition or accolades—it was in knowing that we were making a real difference in the community

through our work at the KVK. And that was something no amount of gossip or criticism could ever take away.

By the time I left the KVK, it was a completely transformed institution, brimming with potential and actively contributing to the betterment of farmers' lives. The lesson I took from this experience was simple: when you lead with vision and purpose, you will inevitably face resistance, but that resistance only strengthens your resolve to continue moving forward.

CARPS

The building I came across was an architectural relic, built in 1942, long before the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Bangalore even came into existence. It was originally the 'Agriculture Research Station (ARS),' established to conduct research on coastal agriculture. Over time, it merged with UAS, Bangalore but retained its identity as ARS. However, in 2006, the ARS was relocated to Bramhavara, a place 70 kilo meters away from Mangalore, where there was already a Zonal Agricultural Research Station. After its shift, the original building was left abandoned for nearly 15 years. The neglect had reduced it to a dilapidated structure, crumbling and forgotten—an almost tragic reminder of the once-important research that had taken place within its walls.

During my time at UAS, Bangalore, I had worked extensively on problematic soils, developing packages of practice aimed at utilizing these otherwise difficult soils for agricultural purposes. This experience had sparked an idea in my mind. I envisioned establishing a dedicated centre that could continue research along similar lines—something that could address coastal agriculture's unique challenges. That's when I conceived the idea of the 'Centre for Applied Research on Problematic Soils (CARPS).' This centre would be a hub for research into the utilization of problematic soils, and I saw the abandoned ARS building as the perfect home for this new venture.

With the support of the university, I secured an initial budget of Rs. 20.0 lakhs for upgrading the facility. However, when I approached the estate branch to begin the process, I was met with the usual bureaucratic delays. They claimed they needed more time

to provide a formal estimate and mentioned that the cost for repairing the building alone could run as high as Rs. 10-12 lakhs. The delay and the inflated costs were frustrating, but I wasn't someone to be easily deterred.

One of the lessons I had learned from observing my brother, Siddaraju, who worked in civil construction, was that you don't always need to rely on external contractors for such projects. Having spent considerable time watching him handle various civil works, I had absorbed a lot of practical knowledge. I knew how to evaluate a construction project and manage it efficiently. So, instead of waiting for the estate branch, I took matters into my own hands.

I reached out to the local community—people who had the skills and knowledge to get the job done at a fraction of the projected cost. To everyone's surprise, including my own, we managed to repair the entire building for just Rs. 1.5 lakh. The transformation was nothing short of remarkable. We reinforced the structure, gave it a fresh coat of paint, and even added a picket fence to compound the area, which added a sense of charm to the place. Antique lights were installed to preserve its historical essence, while state-of-the-art furniture gave it a modern touch.

What was once an abandoned relic of the past was now a fully functional and beautifully restored building, ready to serve as the home of CARPS. In essence, it was a metaphor for what I aimed to achieve with the research centre—taking something problematic, something many would overlook or abandon, and turning it into something useful and thriving.

The project wasn't just about the physical restoration of a building. It was about reviving the spirit of research and innovation that had once thrived within those walls. It was about showing that with the right vision and a bit of determination, even the most broken-down structures—whether physical or metaphorical—could be brought back to life.

In hindsight, this experience reinforced a key philosophy I had carried with me throughout my career: that obstacles, whether they come in the form of dilapidated buildings or bureaucratic delays, are

often opportunities in disguise. Where others saw a crumbling building, I saw the potential for a centre that could contribute meaningfully to agricultural research. And by taking swift, decisive action, I was able to turn that vision into reality.

The initiative received high praise from the *National Bureau of Soil Science and Land Use Pattern (NBSSLUP)*, Bangalore, *UAS Bangalore*, and many others involved in soil science and agriculture. However, the only exception was the lack of recognition from my own colleagues at the university.

July 17th 2017

The decision was made to inaugurate the restored building of the Centre for Applied Research on Problematic Soils (CARPS) on July 10th, 2017, coinciding with Fish Farmers Day. However, due to the availability of the Pro-Chancellor, Sri Venkatara Nadagowda, the event was postponed to July 17th. But as July is the monsoon season in the region, heavy rains started pouring incessantly. On July 14th, just a few days before the scheduled event, disaster struck—the road connecting the College to the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) was completely washed away by the rains. The damage was so severe that it posed a significant obstacle to proceeding with the inauguration.

When I approached the Dean, Dr. M N Venugopal, for a solution, his response was disheartening. He had no clear idea of what could be done under such circumstances, and neither did the estate branch, which was responsible for infrastructure maintenance. Their response was typical of bureaucratic inertia—"No money." I was left standing in a situation where all official routes seemed blocked, and the grand event, something I had put my heart and soul into, was in jeopardy.

But this wasn't just an institutional event to me. I had always considered every project I undertook as "my event", something I owned with a sense of personal responsibility. When no one else stepped up, I decided to take matters into my own hands, literally. I arranged for repairs to be done at my own personal cost—Rs. 1.87 lakhs. I sourced Hume pipes from Suratkal and obtained slabs from both the city corporation and another campus. The contractors I

worked with brought in JCBs and other necessary equipment, and we worked through the night under torrential rains. It was a herculean task, but by morning, the road was restored—good enough to withstand the rains and the traffic for the upcoming event. That same road, built out of sheer necessity and determination, is still in use to this day.

Meanwhile, another initiative had been quietly brewing. At the Bidar campus of the university, a mini-laboratory vehicle had been lying idle for nearly two decades. It had been sponsored by the European Union, and despite having only been driven for a mere 5,000 kilo meters, it had fallen into disrepair and neglect. The vehicle had immense potential as a mobile soil laboratory—an asset that could be of tremendous use, especially in rural and remote areas where access to modern facilities is often limited.

I saw this as another opportunity to take something abandoned and make it useful again. After receiving official permission, I personally took on the responsibility of getting the vehicle repaired. At a cost of Rs. 1.37 lakhs, we restored it to working condition. My team of drivers went to Bidar, retrieved the vehicle, and brought it to our campus. What was once an idle, rusting vehicle now stood rejuvenated, ready to serve its original purpose. We inaugurated the vehicle as a Mobile Soil Laboratory, a vital tool for our research and extension activities.

The day we flagged off the vehicle was a proud moment. All the university officers participated in the traditional pooja ceremony, and we symbolically sent the vehicle off to Mangalore, where it would begin its new life as an essential tool for soil analysis. The symbolism of that moment was not lost on me—just like the building we restored and the road we rebuilt, the vehicle too had been given a second life, and its new journey had just begun.

Both the road repairs and the restoration of the Mobile Soil Laboratory were reflections of a larger philosophy that I hold dear: when faced with obstacles, you can either give in to the limitations imposed by external circumstances, or you can rise above them. In

both cases, what could have been setbacks became opportunities to demonstrate creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience.

The event was graced by the presence of the Minister, Vice Chancellor, Members of the Board of Management, an MLA, an MLC, and numerous officers, with over 500 farmers in attendance. During the program, I was honoured by the Minister for my innovative contributions. I invited my entire family to witness the progress I had made, as the lines between home and office had always been blurred for me. My commitment to my work often took precedence, and in many ways, the office had become an extension of my life's purpose.

But my success seemed to intensify the frustration of my opponents, pushing them to their limits. Every move I made, every action I took, was scrutinized with almost obsessive vigilance—there were times when it felt like I was under live surveillance. Yet, their constant watchfulness never unnerved me. I remained steadfast, bolstered emotionally, politically, and officially.

However, I had made a critical mistake: I underestimated the power of knowing one's enemies. I was unaware of just how deeply entrenched their influence was. Their network was vast and intricate, and unlike me, who had work and purpose, their primary profession seemed to be plotting and scheming. They were professional conspirators, skilled in the art of manipulation and deceit, working quietly but relentlessly in the shadows.

Eventually, there came a day when I found myself ready to leave the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). It wasn't that I had failed; rather, it was the sheer exhaustion of constantly swimming against a tide of resistance. Yet, despite the challenges, I realized that quitting wasn't an act of surrender—it was the recognition that sometimes, "The battle is not worth the fight if it costs your peace and integrity". But I stood at a crossroads, knowing that the path ahead required more than just resilience—it required wisdom, clarity, and a deeper understanding of the forces at play.

In any workplace, one of the earliest lessons you must learn is the importance of identifying your adversaries, regardless of your

own strength or capabilities. Every environment is filled with individuals driven by jealousy, and this, unfortunately, is a natural part of human behaviour. People often have a set expectation of how others should perform and behave. They want you to conform to the average, to stay within the boundaries of what they deem “normal.”

The moment you deviate from this expected norm—whether by excelling, innovating, or simply standing out—you inevitably become a target. They don’t resent you because you’ve done something wrong, but because your success has shaken the comfortable balance they’re used to. Cruelty often stems from insecurity and weakness. And in such cases, there is always a price to pay for breaking away from the mediocrity that binds others.

I, too, had to pay that price. By stepping outside the bounds of what was considered “normal,” I invited their envy, their suspicions, and their hostility. What I had failed to grasp early on was that it’s not just your competence or dedication that matters—it’s understanding the delicate balance of perceptions and expectations around you. You can have all the strength in the world, but without being mindful of the unseen rivalries and undercurrents of jealousy, you might find yourself paying a heavy toll for daring to be different. Unceremoniously, with understanding the science, purpose and efforts that are gone in, the CARPS was taken back.

“The light travels faster than the sound; That’s why some people look smarter before they speak — Alan Dundes”

The Reverse Current

In my primary profession as a Professor of Aquatic Biology, things did not unfold as smoothly as I had hoped. I transitioned from the field of extension to academics with the sole purpose of enhancing my scholarly pursuits. However, my expectations were soon shattered when Dr. Reddy, having completed his tenure as the Director of Research, returned as the head of my department. His return marked the beginning of an even more difficult phase for me. Despite being fully qualified to guide postgraduate students, I was systematically excluded from student allotments. Worse, students were covertly discouraged from selecting me as their guide.

After two years of relentless struggle, I finally succeeded in being assigned one student—a young woman. But to my surprise, after a few months, she began dictating the terms of the research protocol rather than following my guidance. Recognizing that this was not a productive relationship, I suggested that she change her guide. Instead of counselling her, my colleagues, ever eager to undermine me, facilitated her actions. It was a deeply disheartening situation.

Meanwhile, some of the faculty members, who barely even set foot in the classroom, started spreading baseless rumours. A few postgraduate students went so far as to submit a complaint to the Head of the Department, claiming I was not attending classes regularly. One of the signatories of this complaint stood out to me, so I looked him directly in the eye and asked what his father’s profession was. He replied, “A teacher.” I then asked, “Now tell me, what made you sign this letter?” His response was unexpected—he fell at my feet, confessing that they had all signed a pre-written letter, likely orchestrated by someone else.

I simply smiled, wished him well, and let it pass. The student has since secured a job at the Karnataka Fisheries Development Corporation, leveraging the influence. He is leading a content life now, but I am a firm believer in the law of karma. Sooner or later, life has a way of settling its debts. Perhaps he has already begun to pay for his actions, or perhaps that day will come. One way or another, the balance of the universe remains just, even when people around you are not.

After I stepped down from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), another colleague of mine assumed leadership, and rather than moving forward with new initiatives, he seemed more interested in digging through my past work. It was as if a full-scale investigation had been launched into everything I had done. Photocopies of all my bills were distributed widely, and I soon found myself inundated with a flurry of Right to Information (RTI) requests. Many of these requests were meticulously crafted, clearly engineered by a larger group working against me. To my dismay, some of the people behind this effort were my own friends, who had joined forces to fuel this campaign.

Allegations against me began to circulate in local newspapers and on TV channels. When these avenues failed to produce the desired results, they escalated matters by filing a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). Ironically, one of my so-called friends even drove the complainant to the ACB in his own car, only to return afterward to share a cup of tea with me, smiling all the while. The layers of betrayal and deceit ran deep.

Around the same time, the Chairman of the Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, who had sponsored a field research project, began to exert pressure, expecting more than was feasible from the project. When I resisted, he wrote a letter to initiate an inquiry into the project's progress. This was just the opening my adversaries needed. A committee was swiftly formed, not just to examine the specific project but to scrutinize all the projects I had ever managed, even those not under question.

For a brief period, my own Head of Department was acting as the Registrar of the university. Just two days before his retirement, he made it his parting act to formally constitute a committee to investigate all the projects I had handled during my tenure. This committee operated with precision, collecting unprocessed bills and making sweeping conclusions, all without my knowledge or input. My so-called "friends" within the department and college were all too eager to cooperate, handing over documents and assisting the committee in creating a damning report against me.

In an almost twisted display of professionalism, they maintained an air of secrecy so tight that I wasn't informed of any of these developments until much later. They took their roles seriously, upholding their "integrity" by adhering strictly to procedure, even as they plotted my downfall behind closed doors. In a strange way, I couldn't help but admire their consistency—at least they were thorough in their approach, even if their intentions were corrupt.

During this time, Dr. Senthil Vel assumed the role of Dean and brought a fresh perspective to the department. His approach was fast-paced and forward-thinking, particularly when it came to submitting projects for funding. Unlike many traditional academicians, his mindset was focused on rapid progress and results. I had no issues with him; in fact, I appreciated his energy and drive.

Meanwhile, outside of work, I maintained my long-standing passion for badminton, a sport I had played regularly for 32 years. Girish and I were partners, and our regular opponents were Manoj and Kumar Naik. One day, during a routine match, though our opponents were trailing in score, they began mocking us playfully. In a moment of distraction, I made a poor shot and landed awkwardly, tearing a ligament in my leg. This injury required surgery and left me bedridden for a period. However, during this time, not a single one of my close friends—those I had played with or worked alongside—came to visit me.

It was a humbling experience. While political figures like the MLA, the Member of Parliament, and my colleagues Dr. Varadaraju, along with Mr. Shashidhar Badami, all took the time to visit me

during my recovery, the absence of my own friends was glaring. Their silence, indifference, and absence revealed a harsh truth about the fragile nature of friendships in this environment. It became clear that if I were to die on this campus, I would simply become an unnoticed and forgotten body. This realization, coupled with the continuous backstabbing, betrayal, and two-faced nature of those I had once trusted, left me deeply disillusioned.

Hibernation

Frustrated by the toxic atmosphere and the duplicity of my so-called friends, I made the difficult decision to leave the campus for good. I approached the university administration, requesting a transfer to the Fisheries Research and Information Centre (FRIC) in Hebbal, Bangalore. To my relief, the university readily agreed, allowing me to move on from a place that had become stifling and emotionally draining. It was time for a fresh start, away from the negativity that had weighed so heavily on me.

Even Rajanna—the person who was instrumental in me becoming professor was surprised when he heard the news. Had I not chosen to transfer there, he would have been the one to lead the department. Some of my friends urged him to oppose my move, and he was unsettled for a few days. However, he soon came around, offering me his full support, and together, we accomplished remarkable things at the Hebbal campus.

We organized numerous webinars at FRIC, each attended by thousands of participants, and significantly increased the footfall to the centre. Together, Rajanna and I provided Detailed Project Reports (DPR) to hundreds of farmers free of charge. We took part in rejuvenating lakes, monitored projects for various organizations, and signed multiple Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with technical institutes. Without adding any financial burden to the university, we upgraded our lab and farm facilities. My time at FRIC was deeply fulfilling, thanks to the unwavering support of Rajanna and the entire team.

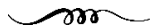
Meanwhile, at the college, Dr. Senthil was striving to elevate it into a referral institute, and many were pushing for it to become a

separate university. However, confusion erupted among the faculty, students, and administration, leading to a strike—first against the government's plans, and later against the dean himself. Some individuals took advantage of the chaotic situation, while I chose to remain silent; But the matter was dragged disproportionately.

Given that I was next in line to Dr. Senthil in terms of seniority, my name was inevitably dragged into the controversy. One of the secretaries even messaged me, accusing me of being behind the strike. I calmly responded, 'I am not responsible for your assumptions. Amidst all this, Dr. Senthil was selected as an expert for the National Green Tribunal and left the campus after resigning.

The university offered me the position of Dean with independent charge, despite objections from some of my friends, who urged the university not to appoint me due to the pending inquiry against me. However, the law doesn't work that way—many hold positions even with accusations unless proven guilty, and I was still eligible for promotions. Rajanna advised me not to return to the college, but how could I refuse? I had made a promise to Dr. H.P.C. Shetty back in 1989 that I would one day lead that institute. Now, with the 'Arabian Sea' calling me once again, how could I turn away from what felt like destiny?

"Trust everyone, but keep your gun powder dry — Oliver Cromwell"



The 'Tsunami'

I was going about my usual routines at FRIC, Hebbal, when at 11:30 a.m., I received an expected email informing me that I had been appointed as the Dean of the College of Fisheries in Mangalore. By 4:30 p.m. that same day, I had already taken a flight and reported to my new post. I greeted Dr. Senthil, congratulating him on being selected as an Expert for the National Green Tribunal. Colleagues came to greet me as well, saying they were happy to see me in this position, though I didn't believe all of them—I simply smiled in return.

The very next day, I called everyone for a meeting and outlined my strategy to revitalize the academic environment. However, I quickly realized that many of them lacked the competitiveness and drive to take on tasks independently. They seemed stuck in their routines, comfortable with the status quo. It was then that the realization hit me: "This battery needs a new car." In other words, we were surviving merely on the reputation of being the first fisheries college, but how long could we ride on that legacy? Change was necessary.

I began holding regular meetings, setting clear deadlines, but none of them were adhered to. There was an entrenched lethargy within the system. Although I could diagnose the problems and knew the treatments, just like in medicine, no cure is possible without the patient's cooperation. The will to change was missing, and I found myself facing a stagnant system unwilling to adapt. We can survive without love, but we cannot coexist without trust. I placed my trust in people and didn't keep my guard up. My aim was to win them over with love. There's a song from the Kannada movie 'Elu Suttina Kote

(Fort with Seven Circular Barriers) that perfectly captures this feeling: "*Eno MaaDalu Hogi..Eno maaDine neenu. Iddante jagavihudu .. neenu badalaade*"-You wanted to change something and did something; but nothing has changed-except you'

Until 2004, I had never even heard the word "*tsunami*." By 2023, something very much like a personal tsunami struck my own life. Just as with a real tsunami, the forces came unexpectedly and from all directions—currents, reverse currents, underwater currents, and upwellings all came crashing down together. Shockingly, it was my own friends who orchestrated the surge. They approached the fisheries minister, proposing someone one of them for my position and suggesting that I should be removed so that this person could take over as dean. They were eager to exploit what they saw as my "weakness."

However, I have never been the kind of person to take advantage of others' weaknesses to elevate myself. My approach has always been to rely on my own qualifications and credentials to move forward. Shortly after my friends left the minister's office, I received a call from him asking, "What's the issue here?" Without hesitation, I responded, "If their claims are legitimate and valid, then let him have the position of dean." The minister didn't seem overly concerned, and the matter seemed to fade in his eyes.

What happened next was even more astonishing. These same friends who were on a mission to remove me casually dropped by my office as if nothing had happened. We shared tea together, and they behaved as though everything was normal. I remained calm and didn't confront them. Instead, I told them that I would defend their actions as long as they were in the right.

Despite the turmoil swirling around me, I maintained my composure and integrity, allowing the situation to play out while standing firm in my own principles. This episode in the university felt like a storm—but I stood resilient, letting the waves crash without letting them sweep me away.

Few months later, when I was on official tour, I was removed from my post and another friend of mine who was the next senior

became the Dean. He resumed the office and made some changes in the local management which was against the guidelines of the university; but for them, someone else was the 'Supreme' and all were acted based on his directions.

Since, I was on tour, I approached the court and it stayed the university order and I resumed the office after a gap fifteen days. It was so humiliating and I had no option to ride the tide.

My Suspension

On June 6th, 2023, a practical exam was scheduled for a new batch of students. However, several students showed up without the authorized agriculture certificates, which disqualified them from taking the exam. This wasn't just my personal decision—it was a long-standing rule that had been in place for decades. As per protocol, students without the necessary certificates were not allowed to write the exam. What I didn't expect was the furious backlash that followed.

The parents of these disqualified students, including prominent fishing leaders like Chetan Bengre and Sudeesh, were furious. They immediately began calling influential figures, including the Home Minister, the Speaker, the Fisheries Minister, and even the Secretary. Soon, I found myself bombarded with phone calls from these high-ranking officials, all pressuring me to allow the students to sit for the exam. However, I stood my ground. When the Secretary instructed me to let them in, I firmly responded, "*I cannot take your instructions*" and proceeded to conduct the exam as per the laid-down procedures. I have deep respect for people, but I fear no one. I have always been direct in my opinions, though this has often been misinterpreted as arrogance. As Franz Kafka once said, *'I was ashamed of myself when I realized life was a costume party, and I attended with my real face.'*

That same evening, I left for Bangalore, taking all the answer sheets with me as part of my duties. On July 7th, the very next day, I happened to meet Yogesh Chawan, who was in Bangalore to get his daughter Amyra admitted to RV College of Engineering, Bangalore. He reached out for assistance, and I was happy to help by

meeting with the administrators and ensuring her admission was secured. It was a busy day, but by evening, we were all ready to unwind. Chawan, along with Prakash and Devinder Singh, joined me for a party later that night.

During the gathering, as we were enjoying the evening, I received a WhatsApp message that left me in shock—it was a notice stating that I had been "suspended" from my duties based on the charges that 'I have not implemented the projects as per the government norms'. The message wasn't entirely surprising, as I knew that certain forces were working behind the scenes to remove me. The registrar, Mr Shivashankar—who was from the Indian Forestry Service, had been acting unusually, as if he were the ultimate authority on the law of the land. In reality, he was being manipulated by many bureaucrats and so-called "Legal Advisory Team," which included an advisor Dr Vijaykumar—who wasn't even a practicing lawyer, but a junior colleague of mine. Despite his lack of credentials, the university had somehow placed its trust in this individual and his questionable guidance.

Even though I had just received news of my suspension, I didn't let it affect my demeanour. I continued to enjoy the party as if it were any other evening. My friends, however, started noticing something was off. Devinder Singh, in particular, kept asking me, "Shiva sir, you don't seem normal today. Is there a problem?" He asked multiple times, but I didn't disclose anything to him or anyone else at the party.

Following the grand, customary celebration of 'Fishcos,' both Chawan and Devinder Singh departed, honouring the long-standing tradition. It was only then, once it was just Prakash and me, that I finally confided in him about everything that had transpired. I told him about my suspension, the pressures I had faced, and how I had stood firm despite it all. He was utterly shocked, clearly taken aback by the gravity of the situation. I, on the other hand, had managed to maintain my composure throughout the entire evening, even though the university's decision to suspend me had hit hard. Inside, I knew I had done nothing wrong; I had simply followed the rules and my principles, which gave me a sense of calm amidst the storm.

Prakash, still in disbelief, suggested, "I'll book a hotel nearby, and we can discuss this further." But I declined. Then he offered another idea: "Why don't you go to Subbi's house? He's the kind of person who can handle situations like this." Subbi had always been a person with a unique and peculiar way of dealing with crises, and he had a knack for resolving issues, no matter how difficult. I agreed and took an Ola cab to his place.

The moment I arrived at Subbi's home and walked in, I told him and his wife, Jyothi, "I've been suspended." To my surprise, they both started celebrating. Subbi's home had always been like a second home to me, a place I stayed whenever I was in Bangalore for years. Their reaction wasn't completely unexpected; in fact, Subbi had often told me that I didn't fit well in a rigid government system. Many times before, he had urged me to leave my job, but I hadn't listened.

But now, they were genuinely happy for me. They saw the suspension not as a setback but as an opportunity. They celebrated the fact that I would be "free" for the next six months. In their eyes, it was a break from the suffocating bureaucracy and a chance for me to reset. Surprisingly, I was completely at ease with their reaction. I didn't feel any guilt, because I knew I hadn't done anything wrong. My intense dedication to my work and the institute was the only reason I had been so deeply involved in my responsibilities. There was no regret, just a deep sense of peace that came from knowing I had always acted with integrity.

We spent the evening together, laughing and reflecting on the irony of the situation. For Subbi and Jyothi, it was a moment of joy; for me, it was a reminder that sometimes, life's unexpected turns are not the end, but rather the start of a new chapter.

Back to 'Arabian Sea'

The day after my suspension, my son Reshi and I decided to head to Mangalore. He took the wheel, and as usual, we were engaged in one of our lively discussions, bouncing around general knowledge questions, sometimes agreeing, sometimes arguing. That's how we've always been—each conversation its own small battle of ideas. As we drove through the winding roads of the Western Ghats, the

music playing in the background suddenly touched a chord deep inside me. It was a song from the movie Kirik Party, with lyrics that went, “*Kagadada DoNiyalli...naa kooruvanta hottayite...Kanisada haniyondur, kaNNalli koothu muttayite...*” —which simply means ‘Is it time to sail away in a fragile paper boat, is the moment to conceal my tears behind my eyes?’, I asked him to replay the song, and as I listened again, something in me stirred.

For the first time since everything had happened, I felt the weight of it all—an overwhelming urge to cry. But I held it back. Instead, I turned to Reshi and said quietly, “I’ve been suspended.” He didn’t react with shock, just calmly asked, “How long?”

“Six months,” I replied.

“Chill, Dad,” he said, with a comforting smile. “Don’t worry about it. Use the time to travel with

Amma, do some painting, maybe even write that book you’ve been thinking about. I’ll help you publish it. Besides, they’re still paying you, right?”

“Fifty percent,” I told him.

“That’s great!” he said, grinning. “Don’t worry, Appa—I’ll make up the difference.” His confidence was so genuine, so uplifting. He was doing his best to lift my spirits, to make the situation seem lighter than it was.

I stayed silent for a moment, deeply moved. My son, who I always thought I needed to protect, was now the one protecting me, emotionally. Then he asked, “Have you told Amma?”

“No,” I replied.

He smiled mischievously, “I’ll give her a surprise.”

When we reached Mangalore, everything seemed casual on the surface. I didn’t go to the office the next day, and surprisingly, Rekha didn’t notice. That night, as we sat down for dinner, she started talking about something she needed me to do “tomorrow, when you go to the office...”

I stopped her mid-sentence and said, “I’m not going to the office.”

She looked puzzled and responded, “Okay, then the day after tomorrow?”

“I’m not going then either,” I replied, then, with a quiet smile, added, “I’ve been suspended.”

he shock hit her like a wave. She stopped eating, staring at me in disbelief. But Reshi and I broke into loud laughter, trying to break the tension. I told her to trust me, that everything would be fine. But even as we laughed, the mood in the house grew heavy, the reality of the situation weighing us down in a way we couldn’t fully shake.

The next evening, around 8:00 pm, Reshi insisted we go out for dinner. We decided, somewhat randomly, to visit the Village Restaurant. Halfway through our meal, I saw a group of people coming out of the restaurant. To my surprise, it was a large group—about twelve people, all gathered together, celebrating. It became clear to me that this wasn’t just any gathering. It was either a celebration of the new dean being sworn in or, more likely, a celebration of my removal from the position. My friends—the very people I had worked with for years—were all there, laughing and enjoying themselves. The person who seemed happiest even took care of their bill.

I remained totally unfazed. I’ve always seen this suspension as just part of the procedure, not something to take personally. Among them was my deadliest rival, Dr. Reddy—ironically, a man who had once been my teacher. I greeted him with genuine warmth and spoke with him as if nothing had changed. He, too, was calm and said, “Don’t worry.” —This coming from the guy who played a key role in getting me suspended! I couldn’t help but smile.

What struck me was the awkwardness of the people around us. They were clearly uncomfortable, perhaps expecting me to lash out or react bitterly. But I didn’t. In fact, Dr. Reddy, despite being my hardcore hater, had always been someone who did what he said, unlike many of my so-called friends. That’s something I’ve always respected about him. We were both cool in the midst of what should

have been a tense moment. I even cracked a few unnecessary jokes just to keep the situation light, to show that their celebration didn't bother me in the slightest.

After they left, I continued my evening with my family. I recognized the faces of those who had gathered there, but I didn't hate any of them. I knew their intentions, but hate isn't something I carry. Because deep down, I believe in my own wings. I may have been grounded temporarily, but I know I can—and will—fly again. This suspension isn't the end. It's just another twist in the journey, and I'm ready for whatever comes next.

*"If you are deceived by the same man twice; May be you are worth it—
Jean Paul Sartre"*

The 'Trials'

After my regular badminton games, I developed a new habit—I started reading law books every day. Despite the situation I found myself in, I didn't alter my routine. In fact, I pushed myself to work even harder. I was still being invited to various events as a guest speaker, panellist, or even chief guest, despite informing the organizers that I had been suspended. It didn't seem to matter to them, and I took on those engagements without hesitation.

At one point, I consulted a high court advocate and paid a substantial fee to stay the suspension order. However, the very next day, I had a change of heart. I decided not to pursue the legal route any further, withdrew my appeal, and lost the money I had paid. It was a lesson in letting go.

During this period, I began writing a book titled "*My Experiment with Truth*." I thought to myself, why should Gandhi have the monopoly on that phrase? Of course, it is my experiments. I started documenting all of my work and contributions towards the institute. At the same time, I began packing up all my mementoes and accolades, placing them in a box. There were moments when the frustration and disillusionment became so strong that I seriously considered burning everything—every certificate, every award, every sign of my accomplishments in the centre stage of the college. The mementoes I had displayed in the Dean's chamber, I left them right where they were, untouched, as if they no longer held meaning for me. The book, however, was ready to go.

My Mistakes

It's not that everything I've done in life was right. One evening during dinner, my son Reshi asked me, "What, according to you,

were your mistakes?" I replied, "I've always done my best," and added, "I trusted people too much." However, he wasn't really listening; he had already formed his response. He said, "Appa, your words are sharp; they linger in people's minds and cause stress. I've experienced that myself."

He urged me not to celebrate too much and instead focus on making others feel happy by acknowledging and appreciating their efforts. He also pointed out that I'm not a good listener. As Rekha served the food, she gave her approval, and the two of them celebrated with a high-five. "Whenever someone shares something remarkable they've experienced, you shouldn't immediately add your own story," he said. Reshi practices what he preaches—he frequently praises people for even the smallest of things. To me, it sometimes feels awkward, but perhaps this is the new normal I need to adapt to.

I recognize now that I have been sharp and critical in my responses. I'm consciously working to soften both the intensity and tone of my words. I'm not here to justify my attitude or the way I've lived, but if holding on to those habits is costing me my happiness, I'm willing to change. And, in fact, I am already in that process of changing my behaviour and attitude.

There's a deeper reflection here. 'Life is not about being right all the time, but about evolving, learning to listen, and understanding how our actions impact others'. Sharpness in words might bring clarity, but too much of it can also bring pain. The art of living gracefully may very well be in knowing when to temper your truth with kindness, and when to remain silent so that others can fully express themselves. In doing so, I realize that true strength lies not just in standing firm in one's principles, but in being flexible enough to adapt for the sake of 'harmony and joy'. Ultimately, happiness isn't found in always being right; it's found in the relations and compromises we nurture along the way.

Coming back to my inquiry, I was called to Bangalore for an official hearing. A retired judge had been appointed as the inquiry officer. I stayed at Subbi's house once again, and his brother, a criminal lawyer—ironically, quite a "criminal" fellow himself—tried

to intimidate me with legal jargon. His words were meant to guide, but instead, they only heightened my anxiety.

The day of the trial, I meticulously dressed, donning a coat as a mark of respect for the gravity of the process. Subbi, my friend, had raised his eyebrows and asked, "Do you really need to wear a coat for a trial?" His words carried a hint that I should be simple when I attend such enquiries. But for me, it wasn't just about the attire—it was about my mindset. The coat symbolized my professionalism to face whatever lay ahead, a silent acknowledgment of my confidence. Others had advised me to be humble, to show deference, even to appear meek in front of the judge, as though surrendering would win me some unspoken favour. But I was neither meek nor submissive. I entered the courtroom calm, with confidence radiating through every step, my head held high, because I knew I had done nothing wrong.

Initially, I had arranged for legal support to assist in the hearing, believing that expertise would be my shield in this battle. But after meeting with a so-called legal expert in Bangalore, I realized that his intentions were questionable. His interrogation was relentless, as if his purpose was not to defend me but to confuse me, to deepen the complexity of my case rather than untangle it. In that moment, I had an epiphany: I did not need anyone to speak for me. I had lived my truth, and that truth alone would be my defense. I decided to represent myself, relying on my own instincts, my knowledge, and the principles I had followed all along.

In many ways, that day was less about defending against accusations and more about proving my own resilience. The system, with all its rules, hierarchies, and facades, was testing me. But systems, no matter how powerful, are made of people. And people, no matter how high their rank or title, are bound by human limitations. I refused to allow the system to break me. I was unwavering in my belief that I had done no wrong, and that was enough to carry me through the storm.

When the trial began, there was chaos, a struggle with the bureaucracy. I stood quietly as they fumbled with the paperwork and

protocols. It was ironic—they were there to pass judgment on me, yet they couldn't manage their own processes. At one point, I offered to help them organize the documents. The individual assigned by the university, Dr Vijaykumar, who should have been playing the simple role of a clerk, took it upon himself to interrogate me. I met his gaze directly and said, "Understand your limitations." Then, I systematically presented my side of the story, addressing each of the 19 charges made against me, one by one. I had been called to Bangalore four or five times for this trial, and every time, I stood firm, resolute in my thoughts, defending myself with clarity and conviction.

During one of these sessions, a person from the regional office entered the room, mistakenly assuming I was the judge. He began presenting his records to me. I smiled and gently informed him that I was not the one presiding over the trial. The misunderstanding, though small, gave me a strange sense of validation. Even in such an environment, my attitude projected authority and professionalism, something the system itself had to recognize.

On the final day of the inquiry, after all the formalities, I handed over a copy of my book, "My Experiments with Truth," to the judge. He looked at the cover, slightly puzzled, and asked, "What is this?" I calmly replied, "It's my biography." His response was curt, almost dismissive: "We do not consider anything outside the matter at hand. We are only concerned with the charges." He pointed towards the table, indicating where I should place the book, as though it were of no consequence and asked me to leave the hall. By the time I reach the door, I turned back. 'The book was in the judge's hand...'

But for me, that book symbolized everything. It wasn't just pages filled with my thoughts—it was the culmination of my journey, the trials of my conscience, and the truth I had lived. I placed the book on the table, saluted the judge, and smiled once again. I wasn't seeking validation from the system; I had already found it within myself. As I walked out of the hall, I felt lighter, knowing that whatever the outcome, I had stayed true to myself. I had faced the storm head-on, with nothing more than my principles and my

unshakeable belief in my own truth. The rest, I knew, would fall into place in due time.

What do I learn from you “Arabian Sea?”

Yes, the Arabian Sea is vast, tumultuous, and ever-changing. Like any great ocean, it wears many faces, sometimes gentle and inviting, sometimes fierce and unforgiving. It brings the rains that nourish the land, and the storms that threaten the shore. It alters its tides without warning, and shifts its currents in ways that can either carry or capsize those who venture into it. Yet, despite its apparent chaos, the sea holds a profound wisdom within its waves. It teaches me that life, too, is a vast expanse of uncertainty, full of storms and calm alike, where the tides of fortune shift unexpectedly, but one must learn to navigate through it with poise and patience. What do I learn from you, oh sea, except to be calm in the face of adversity?

As one sails farther from the shore, away from the noise of the world, the sea becomes something else entirely. Beneath the surface, where most eyes never wander, lies a different reality—calm, clear water that stretches endlessly. Here, there is a stillness that contrasts sharply with the turbulence above. It is as though the further you travel, the more the sea reveals its inner peace, its true nature that isn't bound by the surface storms. And so it is with life. The deeper you go into your own journey, the more you move away from the noise of everyday struggles, the more you find that inner stillness, that clarity that can only be reached through experience and introspection. It's not about escaping the storms, but about finding that calmness within, even as the world around you rages.

But the sea has its depths, places where few dare to venture. Dive deep enough, and you enter the realm of '*Divya Mouna*'—the deep silence, where even sound seems to be swallowed by the water, and the pressure is so immense that it's barely perceptible to the senses. There is a harmony here, among the unseen creatures and the invisible forces, a balance that defies the chaos above. In this depth, life thrives in ways we cannot fully comprehend. And this is perhaps the greatest lesson the sea offers: In the deepest struggles, where the pressure is most intense, we often find the quiet strength we never

knew we had. It's in these silent depths of life where true resilience is born, where the soul learns to thrive under pressure, where harmony is found not in avoiding difficulty, but in embracing it.

What is life, after all, if not an ocean of experiences—sometimes smooth, sometimes rough? The sea changes constantly, just as life does. It ebbs and flows, brings opportunities and challenges, but in its very nature lies a promise: that after every storm, there will be calm. The storms of life may be frightening, they may toss you around and make you feel small, but they cannot last forever. Just as the sea eventually settles, so too will the challenges of life pass. The key is not to fight the waves but to move with them, to trust that the calm will come, and to find peace in the rhythm of the struggle. The sea teaches patience—its vastness reminds us that no matter how daunting a storm may seem, it is but a small moment in the greater expanse of time.

And then there is the silence of the sea. Not the silence of absence, but the profound, heavy quiet that exists deep within. This is not the silence of surrender, but the silence of wisdom, where every ripple speaks of balance, every wave tells a story of resilience. The sea does not rage for the sake of it; it is part of a larger harmony, a rhythm that governs all things. In its depths, there is no rush, no urgency—only a quiet persistence, a strength that comes not from force, but from patience and endurance. The sea teaches that in the silence, in the quietest moments of life, we often find our greatest strength. It is here, in the stillness, where the most important battles are won, not with noise or force, but with quiet resolve.

Oh, my sea, what do I learn from you? I learn to be calm, to embrace the storms as part of the journey, and to dive deep into the silence when the weight of the world becomes too much. I learn that the strongest force is not the storm, but the peace that lies beneath it, the calm that endures even in the face of chaos. You teach me that life is not about avoiding the storms, but about finding the courage to sail through them, knowing that in the end, there is always calm water waiting on the other side. What do I learn from you, oh sea, except to be calm, and in that calmness, to find my true strength?

The “Sea=MC²”

I’ve always believed in thinking beyond the conventional boundaries, stepping outside the confines of the “normal” box. Conformity and routine have never held much appeal for me; in fact, I’ve always felt that normal is simply too mundane, too predictable. The ordinary distribution curve doesn’t represent my life—it’s never resonated with who I am. Normalcy, to me, is stagnant, and I have an inherent need to explore the extremes of possibility. I thrive in that space where most feel uncomfortable. I’m a nocturnal person, someone who embraces the night. I sleep less, but when I do, I sleep deeply, almost as if I’m drawing energy from the quiet hours. My wife, Rekha, can attest to this. She alone can bear the sound of my sleep, which she humorously compares to the growl of a tiger. It’s a rare privilege, one that only she tolerates with a knowing smile.

In the stillness of the night, when most minds rest, I let mine wander freely. I’ve come to appreciate the random moments of inspiration that strike when least expected. And on one such night, three profound ideas took root in my mind, ideas that would shape the next chapter of my life. One was to establish ‘MAGADA Research Foundation’—The “**DA**” in Magada comes from my native place ‘**Dalavayi** Kodihalli’. The second one was ambitious and bold—the concept of building a second fisheries college. A grand vision, no doubt, but the practical side of me intervened. If I create another college, where will all those graduates find jobs in a market that’s already oversaturated? It’s a conundrum many educators face: creating opportunity without a clear path for employment. So, I set that idea aside, though not discarded entirely, and focused on the third idea—a visionary concept that felt much more tangible, relevant, and scalable: the establishment of the Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Committee, which I called ‘**Sea=MC²**.’

This wasn’t just another fleeting thought—it was an idea with depth, scope, and a clear sense of purpose. I immediately began to conceptualize what the committee would represent. The Arabian Sea is an untapped treasure of resources, but managing those resources sustainably requires a collective effort. It was clear to me that the time had come to formalize this effort, to bring together the best

minds and resources to work toward a common goal of responsible fisheries management. I quickly moved to put pen to paper, outlining the concept in detail. I carefully defined its objectives, ensuring that each aspect of the organization would serve a clear, long-term purpose. From the governance structure to the practical operations, everything was meticulously planned.

Momentum began to build as I reached out to professionals from across the globe—academics, industry experts, and policymakers—all of whom responded with enthusiasm. Each conversation reinforced my belief that this was not only the right step but a necessary one. As I shared my vision with these experts, I could sense the same excitement in their voices, the recognition that this was something truly unique. One of the first people I spoke to was Dr. Balasuri Bommaiah, a brilliant artist from Mumbai known for his iconic designs and he has developed logos for many government institutes including that of NFDB, Hyderabad. I asked him to craft a logo for the committee, something that would embody its values and aspirations. He was immediately on board, and together, we began to bring the vision to life visually.

At the same time, I contacted creators from New Delhi, commissioning them to design a lapel pin for the organization. These tangible symbols were important—they would give Sea=MC² a professional identity even before it was officially registered. The speed at which everything progressed surprised even me. The idea was only a seed in my mind, but within weeks, it had blossomed into something real, something concrete. The wheels were in motion, and there was no turning back. Despite not having completed the legal registration process, I had already made significant strides. The infrastructure was being set up, the branding was taking shape, and the people involved were fully committed.

It was exhilarating to see how quickly my vision came to life. What began as a late-night burst of inspiration had now become a full-fledged movement, and I couldn't help but marvel at the process. It reinforced what I had always believed—that with the right mindset, no idea is too big, no vision too far-reaching. It was a reminder that thinking outside the box wasn't just a philosophy—it

was a way of life, a path toward realizing dreams that most would consider impossible. And as Sea=MC² grew, so did my confidence in the power of unconventional thinking. The society is established now. My friends and fishermen across the west coast of India have joined me. Even during the stressful period, I was busy in building my own institute. I was not suspended, this organization would not have born. Sometimes, you should be insulted, you should fail, so that you come back strong like and me and my Arabian sea.

Even in the most stressful times, when it seemed like everything was working against me, I found myself consumed by a new purpose—building my own institute. It was almost as if fate had orchestrated the perfect storm, forcing me to confront a reality I wasn't prepared for but one that was necessary for my growth. The irony of the situation wasn't lost on me. Had I not been suspended, had I not faced that humiliation, this organization—the Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Committee—would never have been born. It's in these moments of setback that life offers us an unexpected gift, a chance to pivot, to evolve into something greater than we ever imagined.

Sometimes, you need to be knocked down. You need to feel the sting of failure, the sharp cut of insult, to awaken something deeper within you. There is a kind of strength that can only be forged in the fire of adversity. Like the tides of the Arabian Sea, which rise and fall with the moon's pull, life has its cycles of highs and lows. But it's during the lows that we discover who we truly are. It's easy to ride the waves of success, to feel invincible when everything is going your way. But true resilience comes from surviving the storms, from facing the darkest days with the knowledge that you will rise again—stronger, wiser, and more determined.

I often think of the Arabian Sea as a metaphor for life. It can be vast and rough, seemingly unforgiving, with its storms and shifting currents. It tests you, pushes you to your limits. But beyond that surface turbulence lies something deeper—calm, clear waters that reflect the tranquillity of those who can endure the chaos above. And if you dive even deeper, into the abyss where the light barely penetrates, you find the most profound silence, a pressure so intense

it's almost crushing, but one that holds the harmony of life in its depths. This is what the sea teaches me—to remain calm, to embrace the pressure, and to trust that beneath the surface of turmoil, there is always peace.

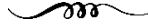
My suspension was like a storm I hadn't anticipated. It was a test of my resilience, a challenge to my identity and my principles. But instead of letting it break me, I chose to see it as an opportunity—a chance to reinvent myself, to build something new. The insult, the failure, it didn't diminish me; it empowered me. It was the catalyst that forced me to think outside the box, to dream bigger than the confines of my previous role. It was a reminder that sometimes the greatest achievements are born not in moments of triumph but in the wake of defeat.

If the sea can rise again after every storm, why can't we? The sea doesn't apologize for its power, its unpredictability. It doesn't ask for permission to reshape the shorelines or to cleanse the land with its waves. It simply does what it must. And I realized that I, too, had to embrace this philosophy. I couldn't dwell on the past or wallow in self-pity. I had to move forward, to trust in the strength I had gained from my trials, and to use it to create something meaningful. My 'Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Coordination Committee' was born out of that spirit, that refusal to be defined by failure.

So, yes! sometimes you need to be insulted. Sometimes you need to fail, to lose what you think defines you, so you can rebuild yourself into something stronger, more resilient, more authentic. Like the sea, I came back—not as the person I was before, but as someone transformed by the storms, someone who now knows that even in the darkest depths, there is a stillness, a quiet power waiting to rise again. If everything around seems dark, look again, you may be the light.

"Time doesn't heal everything, but acceptance does"

*"You need power only to harm people. For everything else, love is enough.
—Charlie Chaplin"*



Reunion with the 'Arabian Sea'

As one of my favourite songs goes, '*ODuva Nadi Saagarava SErale BEku*' – 'A flowing river must eventually reach the sea,' after six months of what I like to call an "official trial rest," on October 28th, 2023, I was reinstated as the 'Professor of Aquatic Biology' at the very same college from which I had been suspended. It was an ironic return, but one filled with personal revelations. During those six months, I experienced a silence that spoke louder than any words. None of my so-called friends reached out during that period—people who, in the past, would call me multiple times a day, often for trivial matters. Now, it became clear to me: these interactions were not based on any real bond. They had no meaningful content to offer, no depth of connection. It was just noise, a surface-level engagement for survival.

I realized that I had been wrong in calling them friends. They were, at best, acquaintances—people I happened to share a space with, perhaps out of convenience or necessity, but not out of any true emotional or intellectual connection. A true friend, I've come to believe, is someone who inspires you, who celebrates your success, and who stands by your side when you're at your lowest. A friend shares your joys, but more importantly, they hold space for your sorrows. In this case, nothing of the sort happened. There was no celebration when I was reinstated, no solace during my most trying moments; However, I've helped most of them on numerous occasions, though I have no desire to seek recognition for it. That's just how I live by default—it's simply part of who I am.

In fact, as I reflect on it, the very people I had once considered friends were the root cause of my downfall. The entire world seemed to know this, it doesn't mean that I was blind to it. They had watched, perhaps even contributed to my sinking, and not a single hand was extended to help me rise again. I often wonder, had I not been through this ordeal, would I have ever seen their true colours? Perhaps this trial was necessary—not just in the legal sense, but in a personal, emotional sense as well.

The experience was a harsh lesson in discernment. It taught me the difference between those who are simply around you and those who are truly with you. The people who call themselves your friends when times are good, but who disappear when the clouds gather, are not friends at all. They are passers-by in your life, temporary characters in a long story. Real friends don't just exist in the good chapters; they show up in the dark ones too.

It's a strange thing to see people for who they truly are. It's like waking up from a long dream. You start to understand that you've been living in a world of illusions, mistaking proximity for loyalty, mistaking shared work or shared interests for genuine friendship. But now, after this storm, the air is clear, and so is my understanding. Those I once held dear have been reduced to mere figures in the background of my life. And it's a clarity I'm grateful for, even though it came at a cost.

So, as I move forward, I do so with a new definition of friendship. I've learned that it's not the number of people who surround you that matters, but the depth of the few who stand by you in silence, in strength, and in solidarity. The rest? They are just part of the scenery, not the journey.

The day I reported back to duty after my reinstatement, a few staff members approached me, carrying prasadam, a symbol of divine blessings. They told me that they had been praying for me all along, hoping for my return. It was a gesture of kindness and faith, and I couldn't help but notice the irony. These were the same people who had come with prasadam when I first took office as Dean, offering the same good wishes and blessings.

As they handed me the prasadam, their faces reflected a mixture of relief and apprehension. One of them quietly said, "The people around you are deadly," just as they had whispered in the past. They had seen what I had endured—the politics, the betrayals, and the scheming that had unfolded behind closed doors. Yet, each time they made such comments, I simply smiled, not because I was unaware of the truth, but because I had chosen not to let it weigh me down.

Their prayers and prasadam were not just offerings of faith but also subtle acknowledgments of the battles I had fought, both seen and unseen. And while they could not intervene or change the tides, their silent support was their way of standing by me. I understood that everyone around me played a role in this intricate drama of life, but I had always walked my path with my head held high, undeterred by the "deadly" nature of the people surrounding me.

I had learned over time to face these adversities with grace, knowing that while prayers and prasadam were comforting, it was my inner strength that had carried me through. The staff may have seen the storm around me, but I was the one navigating it, smiling through it all, just as I did that day.

I Became 'Zen'

As the renowned novelist Paulo Coelho once said, "If it costs you your peace, it's too expensive." I wasn't willing to sacrifice my happiness. *"It was not out of fear or cowardice that I stood back. I have always been recognized for my indomitable spirit, confronting challenges and systems with unwavering resolve, no matter the cost. Yet, in the grand scheme, it seems fate or the god never deemed me worthy rivals."* After witnessing the brutality of the world among the so-called learned, something within me shifted. The desire to win, to prove myself, to compete in the relentless game of power and politics, quietly faded away. During this difficult time, I delved deep into my mind. It felt like the Arabian Sea—vast, vibrant, deep, calm beneath yet turbulent at the surface. Just like the sea, it didn't concern itself with what the world thought of it. I realized that striving for recognition in a world where even the most educated could be ruthless was a hollow pursuit. I repeatedly watched the English movie *'The Pursuit of Happiness'* and

the Kannada film '*Bangarada Manushya*'—meaning 'the golden man', starring my favourite actor Dr. Rajkumar. While the two movies seem unrelated, they both reminded me of the transformative journey of Siddhartha, the prince who became Gautama Buddha. He, too, had once been surrounded by wealth, prestige, and the allure of success, only to see the suffering that lay beneath the surface. His enlightenment came not from conquest, but from letting go, from seeking inner peace rather than external validation.

In that moment of realization, I decided to follow a path similar to his. No, I would not renounce the world like Buddha did, but I would embrace a new kind of renunciation—the renunciation of my attachment to outcomes, victories, and recognition. I even composed sonnets based on my experiences and titled the collection "*Naanu Zen Aada Kathe*" — The Story of 'My Journey to Becoming Zen.'

I chose to be happy, regardless of my circumstances, understanding that true happiness comes from within, not from accolades or the approval of others. I decided that my contentment would no longer depend on the chaotic forces outside of me but on the calm I cultivated within. It was a profound shift, one that liberated me from the pressures and expectations that once weighed so heavily on my shoulders.

I resolved to stop worrying about the future, the past, or even the present moment. Worrying, I realized, had never solved a single problem. It only clouded my mind and drained my energy. Like Buddha, I came to understand that life is full of inevitable suffering, but our reaction to that suffering is what defines us. I chose to face whatever came my way with grace and acceptance, rather than resistance and anxiety. Life, I realized, was too short to be spent in constant fear of what might go wrong. Instead, I would meet each day with a smile, knowing that my peace could not be taken away by external circumstances.

And in this newfound peace, I decided to love everyone around me. Not because they were perfect or deserving of my love, but because love is a choice, a way of being in the world that transcends the flaws and failings of others. The people around me—whether

they were allies, adversaries, or indifferent observers—were all part of the same human experience. They, too, had their struggles, their insecurities, and their moments of weakness. By choosing love, I was choosing to rise above the pettiness, the jealousy, and the competition that had poisoned so many relationships in my life. I no longer needed to win their approval or outshine them in any way. Instead, I offered them compassion, understanding, and kindness.

This was not a passive choice, nor was it an act of surrender. It was an act of inner strength. To love in a world that often encourages division and rivalry requires courage. To be content when everything around you seems uncertain takes resilience. And to let go of the desire to win when the world tells you that winning is everything—that takes wisdom. In embracing these new values, I felt lighter, freer. The battles that once consumed me no longer held the same significance. I could see the world with clearer eyes, not as a battlefield, but as a place where we are all trying, in our own flawed ways, to find peace and meaning.

In this way, I became ‘**Zen**’ like Siddhartha—not in the literal sense of leaving behind everything I knew, but in the sense that I found my own path to enlightenment. I had seen the brutal side of life, and instead of letting it embitter me, I allowed it to soften me, to open my heart wider. The desire to win was gone, but in its place, I found something far more valuable: the desire to be at peace, to love without condition, and to live with joy, no matter what the world brought my way.

Now, I find it impossible to hate anyone. The desire and energy for hatred have simply faded from my life. Instead, I feel an overwhelming sense of peace and a boundless capacity to love. The energy that once might have been consumed by bitterness or resentment is now entirely devoted to helping others, in any way I can. I’ve come to realize that those who wronged me, those who tried to pull me down, are not deserving of my anger—they are, in fact, in need of compassion.

I began to reflect on my so-called haters. Perhaps they never received the love they needed in life, and that void has shaped their

actions. Maybe their upbringing was fraught with struggle, hardship, and survival, leaving them to develop an animal-like instinct to acquire, to compete, to dominate, no matter the cost. I thought about how difficult it must be to live with that mindset, always in pursuit of something, never feeling truly at peace.

Their actions, their schemes, and their betrayals were not personal anymore in my eyes. They were merely expressions of their own suffering, their own lack of love. It was this realization that allowed me to let go of any lingering negativity I might have held towards them. I decided to respond with the one thing they were missing—*love*.

By loving them, I am not condoning their behaviour but acknowledging that they are, in their own way, just as much a part of this human experience as I am. I am no longer interested in winning battles or proving myself right. Instead, I'm interested in lifting others, even those who have tried to bring me down. Love, after all, is the greatest strength I possess, and I choose to use it freely.

Now, I move through life with a heart full of acceptance. The world, with all its challenges and complexities, has not made me bitter. Instead, it has taught me that love is the only true answer, the only way to heal—not just myself but the world around me.

Recently, one of my colleagues, Mrs. Vandana Suvarna—a *good hearted lady*, approached me with a question that held more weight than she perhaps realized. "Sir, how are you able to be so happy after everything you've been through?" she asked, her tone a mix of curiosity and disbelief. I paused for a moment, reflecting on the journey that had brought me to this serene place, and then shared with her an anecdote that had stayed with me, like a mantra whispered by the universe: "*If we are bitten by a snake, we don't waste our energy chasing the snake to kill it; instead, we focus on removing the venom from our body.*"

I could see her eyes widen with a subtle understanding, but I knew this was only part of the truth. "You see," I continued, "I've spent years learning that life is not about avenging the wrongs or

fighting the external world. The real battle is internal. When bitten by the venom of betrayal, deceit, or even hatred, it's not the snake that needs to be conquered—it's the poison it leaves behind." The poison, in its many forms, is insidious. It manifests as anger, resentment, and bitterness, slowly eating away at our peace, clouding our ability to see clearly. For years, I had unknowingly allowed this venom to seep into my soul. But now, my focus is singular—I am in the process of removing that venom from my body, from my spirit, and from my mind.

I could feel the weight of those words hanging in the air, and yet, there was a lightness in speaking them. "However," I added with a soft smile, "there are many snakes still slithering around in this vast campus." The metaphor wasn't lost on her. She knew, as I did, that the world is full of such serpents—people driven by fear, insecurity, or ambition, who lash out and strike without warning. But I no longer feared them. I had made peace with their existence, understanding that their venom only has power if I allow it to.

We both chuckled softly at the irony of it all. She smiled back at me, but I could see she was still pondering the depth of what I had said. What I had learned through my struggles, through the chaos and pain, is that happiness—true happiness—is not the absence of turmoil, but the transcendence of it. It is not about eradicating the snakes from our lives, because that's an impossible task. The world is filled with snakes. But happiness is about purifying ourselves, freeing ourselves from the venom they inject into our souls, and in that purification, we discover a profound joy that cannot be shaken.

In that moment, I realized that my greatest victory was not surviving the external trials I had faced, but learning to heal from the inside out. And that healing, I told her with a quiet conviction, is ongoing. It is a daily practice, a conscious effort to release what no longer serves me, to forgive what was never within my control, and to rise above the petty struggles of life. For as long as I am alive, there will be snakes. But I no longer chase them, for my energy is now devoted to something far more important: the preservation of my inner peace, my unshakable joy, and the love I carry for the world, despite its serpentine inhabitants.

And so, as we stood there, sharing this fleeting moment of understanding, I giggled, and she smiled—a shared recognition that, in this great theatre of life, we are all bitten, but it is how we choose to heal that defines our path.

Now, I have established the 'Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Coordination Committee' with a single-minded purpose: to serve both the fishermen and the vast, unpredictable Arabian Sea. My mission is not merely professional, but spiritual—a merging of purpose and identity. As I dedicate myself to the community and the ocean, I feel a deeper connection, knowing that in the end, I will dissolve into the very sea I serve, becoming a part of its infinite expanse.

While writing these lines, I am reminded of the poignant verse by Dr. G.S. Shivarudrappa, '*Kaanada Kadalige... hambaliside mand*', meaning, "Could I ever join the sea some day?" This line resonates with me because it reflects a yearning for unity with the eternal, a desire to be one with the forces of nature that are beyond human control. To serve the sea is to surrender to it, to recognize that we are not separate from the world we navigate but deeply intertwined with it. Just as the sea ebbs and flows, so too does life, and one day, just as water returns to the ocean, I too shall return, leaving behind only the ripples of my **'love'** and the **'work'** I've done.

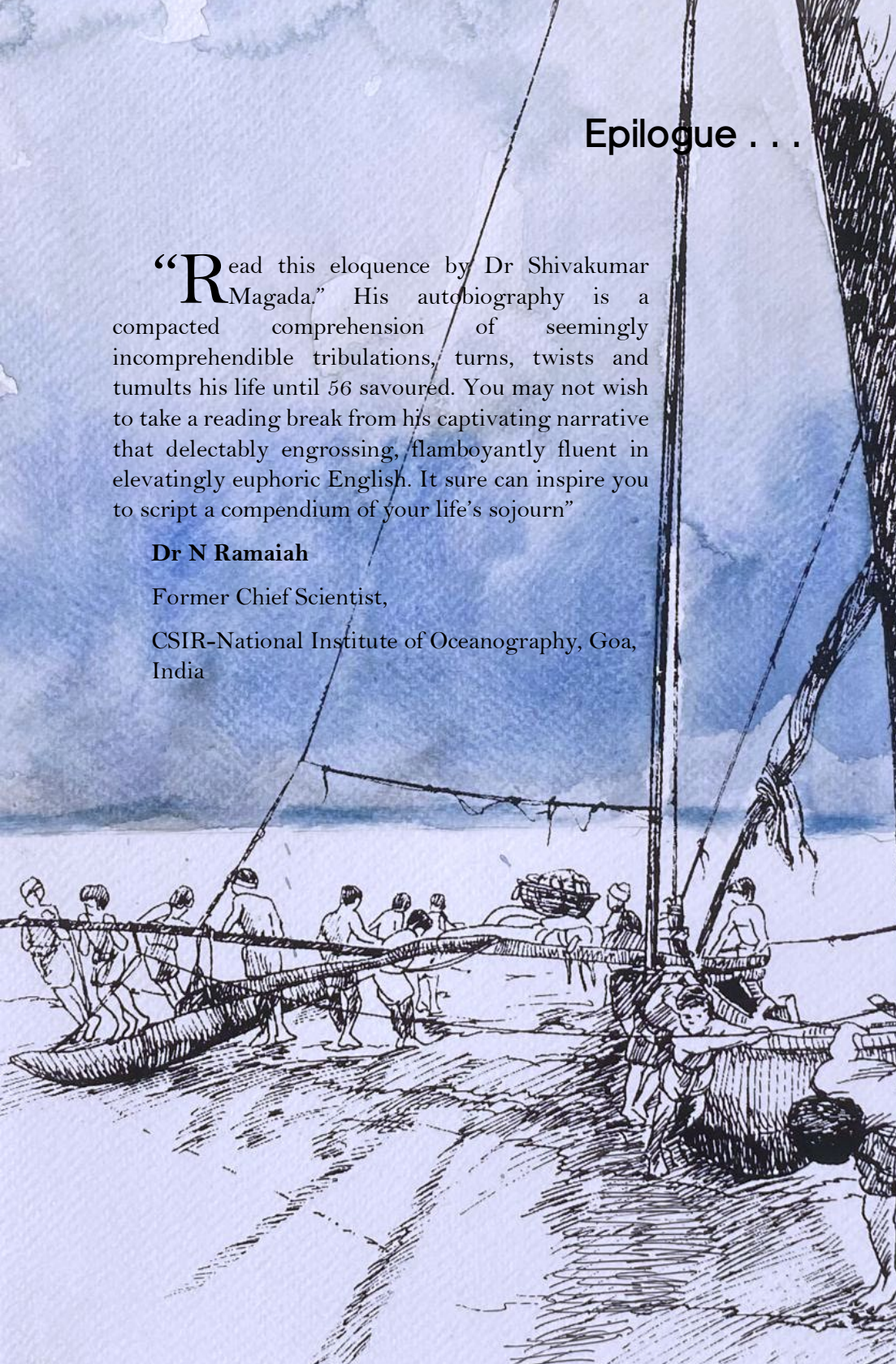
Epilogue . . .

“**R**ead this eloquence by Dr Shivakumar Magada.” His autobiography is a compacted comprehension of seemingly incomprehensible tribulations, turns, twists and tumults his life until 56 savoured. You may not wish to take a reading break from his captivating narrative that delectably engrossing, flamboyantly fluent in elevatingly euphoric English. It sure can inspire you to script a compendium of your life’s sojourn”

Dr N Ramaiah

Former Chief Scientist,

CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography, Goa,
India



Dr. Shivakumar **Magada**, born in 1969, in Mandya, India and holds a master's and a PhD in aquaculture from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore. He worked as an Aquaculture Consultant from 1993 to 1995 before transitioning to academia in 1995. He is a former Dean and is currently serving as a Professor of Aquatic Biology at the College of Fisheries, Mangalore. With over three decades of dedicated service as a researcher and academician, Dr. Magada is also a prolific science writer, playwright, and motivational speaker.

He has written and directed 16 plays and delivered more than 397 talks, inspiring over 100,000 people, especially youth. His talks focus on themes like "How to Live with Our Negatives" and "Big Dreams." If you know Dr. Magada, it's impossible to remain a pessimist.

"If you know him, you can't be a PESSIMIST"

He founded the "Arabian Sea Fisheries Management Coordination Committee," — *an international organization* dedicated to supporting the fishing community and other stakeholders who depend on the "Arabian Sea."

**In the picture, Dr Magada seeing through a window of a research vessel in the 'Arabian Sea'*

*"I sat with my anger long enough until she told me
her real name is grief—*

C.S. Lewis"



"Comprehensively compacted the incomprehensible saga..."

—**Dr N Ramaiah**, *Former Principal Scientist and Great Oceanographer, NIO, Goa*

"With unwavering willpower, the son of a lineman has become a source of energy on his own. The youths who are willing to change their state must read this"

—**Rekha Ramaswamy**, *Home Maker who knows the author for quarter century.*

"Oh god, It is my story..." —**Dinesh B V.**, *Director, Innosolv Pvt. Ltd., the person who supplied the English novels to the author*

"I smiled, laughed, cried, and fell silent... and now, I am thinking."

—**Jennifer**, *Freelance Writer*

"Life experiences are unique but your experiences are extraordinary and intriguing, making for a compelling read"

David Stephen, *USA*