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Academic Growth – Past, Present, and Future

I was a very outgoing child for someone from my town. I am from India. Very few people are fortunate enough to come this far away from home to learn. Yet fewer are ones that come from the same hills that I have been brought up in. Back there, people preferred to settle no further than the periphery of their own districts. I, however, would always be curious about what lay beyond the skies.

(This is an essay about how my past skills would help me excel at university. But it’s also about my past itself and how I came to be here. As the reader would find out in a bit, these are all strongly connected strands of a single journey, pulling on each other like threads in a tapestry.)

I remember the first day of class entering 11th standard. I had the same excitement that I shared my first day at Rutgers. I thought I would have a great time learning about the science that I enjoyed. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic had already put us far behind in covering the course syllabus on day one. Consequently, our teachers had to rush (not that I think they would have crafted a much richer portrayal of how beautiful the subjects they taught were if given any more time). Unlike what I imagined, no one told us we were going to have fun. All were we told is that a lot of us would fail this year.

Like in most schools in India, my high-school for grade 11 and 12 had a very unhealthy learning environment. Rote learning was almost forced into students’ habits and we were made to practice questions all the time for no good reason. Yes, a few times things were really interesting. But the entire process had been made painstakingly frustrating while it could have been much more enjoyable.

I never gave up on reason, courtesy my previous school. I was fortunate enough to have caught the love of logic before shifting my schools. Unlike other kids in the same sciences stream in my class, I loved exploring the depths of subjects, going far beyond what was covered in the books or exams. Although the sciences students would never indulge in non-science activities, I loved going out and participating in clubs.

I would play football (soccer), sing songs, make presentations, build robots, what not! I also took the responsibility of the House captain, knowing it put me far behind in preparing for the JEE exam (A college entrance exam in India). I never minded that though. I understood things at their core. I was a bright student, acing my exams, pondering over deep topics and chatting with people about them. I was told multiple times that I need to focus on one thing and one thing only. But I always persisted on multitasking, having faith in what I had.

I never wanted to limit myself to just one pursuit because it didn’t feel right. I cleared the Indian College entrance exam with flying colors yet decided to come to the US to study.

Fortunately, unlike my high school experience, my excitement did not end up in a disappointment. When I came here, I loved the environment. It was almost as if I was meant to be here. Here, we were encouraged to think of reason – the same reason that I would always set off to find at my own time in high-school. We were encouraged to do more that just academics. I joined clubs, I talk to my professors about abstract math and physics concepts, work on a rocket, a satellite and what not! I hope to maintain the same excitement and passion to learn here at Rutgers as I’ve always been as a child.

It's almost a dream come true. Almost. For the true dream is yet to be achieved. It is a very different education system that what I had been in my entire life. But it somehow feels much more natural to me. Yes, I would also face challenges here. Maybe many more. Maybe ones much more difficult than what I have ever experienced so far. But my favorite thing about being here is that even after being 8000 miles away from home, I’ve been ensured that there are people out there that can help.