Welcome to Mumbai

Today, I want to take you on a journey, to my own little adventure, when I first moved from serene, peaceful, quiet, calm my small village from Satara to the fast spaced, bustling, vibrant where everyone was in some hurry, that is Mumbai. Let me tell you, at the start, life in the big and dynamic city of Mumbai felt like stepping into an entirely different universe.

Honorable Contest Chair and esteemed Toastmaster and dear guests.

During my early days in Mumbai, I preferred using autos for transportation because they were convenient and easily available. I have one memorable incident where I was heading to my residence by auto. I vividly remember that it was cricket match day, and the auto driver initiated a discussion about the cricket match with me—cricket being everyone's favorite topic, I also indulge in it. Suddenly, he received a phone call from the hospital and became very happy. He was thrilled to share with me that his wife had just given birth to twin girls. I was happy for him too. He then mentioned that he needed to drop me off immediately due to an emergency operation for his wife and needed to arrange ₹2,000. He asked me for help and promised to return the money to my address. Without thinking twice, I handed him ₹2,000 right away. Later, when I shared this incident with my friends, they laughed and said I had been scammed. They joked, "Welcome to Mumbai!" Today, I am still waiting for that auto driver to come and return my ₹2,000.

Soon I started favoring Mumbai local trains more for my commute. During my college days, I used to live in Ghatkopar, and my college was VJTI at Matunga Station. In the excitement and innocence of those early college days, I used to leave home with shiny clothes freshly ironed and my bag perfectly packed. But after just a few days, I realized that the state I left home in was not the same by the time I got off the train at Matunga Station. When I get off at the station once-shiny clothes would be turned in to wrinkled. Moreover, I often found that people wouldn't even let me get on or get off at Matunga. I noticed that people showed respect and made space when someone wanted to get off at larger stations like Kurla or Dadar, but when I said I wanted to get off at the smaller station of Matunga, no one would budge, revealing my naivety about the dynamics.

I thought to myself, “The train is not for me,” and I tried taking the BEST bus for one day. It was smooth; in fact, I could reach college in the same state in which I left home. The next day, I happily took a 6-month BEST pass. However, in the same week of getting that pass, the BEST bus started showing its true colors, as the buses began coming late. By late, I mean 30 to 45 minutes late. And you know how it is: when a bus gets late, everyone tries to grab whichever bus comes next. Most of the time, by looking at crowded buses, I would let them pass and wait for the next one.

One day, during exam time, I looked at my wristwatch and realized that to be on time for the exam, I had to catch the next bus at any cost. As usual, the bus was late and was the most crowded I had ever seen. I didn’t get a chance to get in when it halted; instead, I held both bars on either side of the bus's back door with both hands. For the next 5–6 minutes, I was standing on the bottom stair, my entire body outside the bus, with only my hands and legs connected to it. After passing the next couple of stops, I finally managed to get inside. I felt relieved and thought it was good that I hadn’t missed this bus.

To check the time, I looked at my wristwatch—but it wasn’t there. I realized that during my “door adventure,” someone had stolen it. That watch had been with me since 5th grade; it was very special to me. I panicked and started asking people if they had seen my watch, but by my behavior, they realized I was new to Mumbai. In fact, some even laughed at me.

I had no other option but to face the challenges and work on my innocence and naivety. Eventually, I moved back to the Mumbai local trains, where I learned the unwritten rules, and within a few months, I became a seasoned Mumbaikar.

In conclusion, Mumbai didn’t teach me how not to get emotional with the auto driver, Mumbai didn’t teach me how to avoid hanging on the bus door, or Mumbai didn’t teach me how to convince people to give me space to get on or off the train. But Mumbai, the city of dreams, taught me how to survive in life against all odds.