

HIMANK GUPTA



the story of my JEEvan



A POTHOLE FILLED ROAD TO
IIT - BOMBAY

Index

1. Formalities	2
2. NTSE & Pre-JEE Decisions	3
3. New Beginnings: School & Coaching	7
4. Friends, Events & JEE Jokes	11
5. Covid-19, Plot Twists & Recalibrating	16
6. Ramping Up The Intensity	20
7. Mains, Advanced Prep & BITSAT	25
8. Advanced & Reflecting on JEE	37
9. Finalising A College & The Future	46
10. Miscellaneous Memes & Collectibles	50
11. Epilogue	55

Formalities

Disclaimer

Aim: This book is a documentation of my 11th and 12th. The purpose of it is for me to remember this journey for years to come.

Words of caution:

- 1) While I have tried to make it as accurate as possible, I am writing this at the end of the 2 years. A few factual inaccuracies are unavoidable. I apologise in advance if anyone in this story feels misrepresented.
- 2) This is just my experience, it is not advice for anyone - there would be too much survivorship bias. I think a lot of us in similar circumstances can relate to these experiences, but I'm not trying to generalise anyone's journey.
- 3) For legal reasons, all institute/school names have been made fictional identities.

Acknowledgements

Everyone involved must be thanked, since the most important and best part of my journey is the friendships I made as well as the relationships I strengthened. I hope I've done right by everyone I've interacted with. And of course, none of it would have been possible without the incredible support from my parents. I can't overstate how lucky I was to have them by my side throughout.

Chapter 1

NTSE & Pre-JEE Decisions

By the end of 10th grade, I had decided that I would choose science, and write entrance exams for Indian engineering colleges. I definitely liked science and technology, and also had some elementary experience with competitive exams [NTSE, Olympiads].

Picking JEE was not really a "decision" to be made. It was something that had kind of been decided through the years as options narrowed down. Being heavily into football, my parents were open to me taking it up professionally but I chose not to. I preferred playing it as a hobby rather than as a profession. Another option was to go abroad, but my parents told me that going abroad for an undergraduate program was very costly, and were keen that I did my undergrad in India. They said that the work ethic and rigour it builds is unmatched. And if I still wanted to go abroad, it would make a lot of sense to do my post-grad there.

In 10th, I decided to write NTSE. Why? It was supposed to be a warm-up to all competitive exams. Am I happy I did? 100%. It taught me how these exams differ from school exams and the level of preparation needed. But the bigger reason I am so happy I did it is because of how much I learnt. Reading the Karnataka State Board SST textbook might be one of the most useful things I've ever done - it contained so much practical, applicable knowledge. Also, learning mental ability really opened up my mind to problem solving and it was something I really enjoyed.

Anyways, to study for NTSE, one of our family members strongly suggested that I join some coaching institute. In Bangalore, there were two major institutes - Mellon and MIITJAA. We did a lot of research on which one to join. After weighing in several factors like distance, timings, people's reviews of the two places etc., we finally decided to join Mellon. In hindsight, I think that was the correct choice just because of how much closer it was to my house as compared to MIITJAA. Since

I had to go there very often, sometimes only for a half an hour doubt session, the short travel time made my life a lot easier. If I wasn't getting an auto, my mum could drop me even on a two minute notice.

There are two stages in NTSE - state level (Stage 1) and national level (Stage 2). I was preparing for Stage-I alongside my 10th grade boards, and that's when I started realizing that studying for school was not a priority for me. More than anything, it might've just been that NTSE was a fun, new challenge and I was getting annoyed with how much our school teachers would hype up boards. The standard dialogues would be things like, 'Guys boards are very near, only 10 months left', 'Remember to write your answer only this exact way or else the board correctors will cut HALF MARK', 'WHAT you want to go to the bathroom during an exam?! That's not allowed in Boards!!' etc. It was a very *my way or the highway* approach to teaching.

Spoiler: None of this paranoid stuff happened in Boards.

So I started solving NTSE stuff in class. Also, I started bunking school once a week and focusing more on Mellon course work than school course work. It was hard work and a lot of confusion because it was the first time I was doing something like this, but you end up figuring it out. Ultimately, I did clear Stage-I but I failed to clear Stage-II [will discuss in a later chapter].

My school in 10th was Deepwood High (DWH), and somehow everyone got great Board marks there, myself included (98.6%). So now, after my 10th board exams and NTSE Stage-I, it was time to start shifting my focus to JEE. I would say there were two parts to the 'pre-JEE' months - the first was deciding whether or not to shift my Mellon center to one that was very close to my house and the second was deciding which school to join for 11th and 12th.

Mellan Indiranagar vs Koramangala: Initially I was in Mellon Koramangala, which was around 5km away from my house. However, the problem was that there was a flyover construction on the route and it could easily take half an hour to reach there. The other option was Mellon Indiranagar, which had just recently opened but was only 2km from my house. I can't remember the other details we had considered while shifting but I think the main one was just the distance. The

actual shifting of centres turned out to be less straight-forward than anticipated because the Koramangala branch's centre-head would just not let go [it was in his financial benefit to keep students in his centre] and would keep talking about how the Koramangala center was much better. Funnily enough, he left Mellon six months later! And on the flip side, the Mellon Indiranagar's Senior Faculty [Let's call him Chabs] was insistent on me joining Indiranagar's integrated program. Luckily, we stuck to what we wanted and didn't get pressured into anything. These coaching centres run a ruthless business. Their only aim is to make profits and they make bold statements with no truth behind them to get more students to enrol. The unfortunate part is that they are dabbling in sensitive, important matters like a student's career without actually caring about the student. But I suppose they are also doing their best and what's best for their family.

One thing these conversations really did for me was get me into the mindset that the next two years won't be easy. The hard work had to start from day 0 and go consistently all the way to the end. You can't get distracted by things like internal tests & fests in school, one week breaks during Dussehra, sports & friends. Again, funnily enough, pretty much all of that happened!

SPS-Koramangala vs Desi Public School-East: The next choice was picking a school. I couldn't continue in DWH (my old school) because:

1. It was an ISC curriculum which would make it very tough to balance JEE with it.
2. It was very far away from home (20km) which would make things very inconvenient.
3. And most importantly, there is no way I would've stopped playing football and going for morning practice if I was still in DWH. It was something that I had to give up for two years and the only way I could do it was by changing schools.

Between SPS-Koramangala and Desi Public School-E, I mainly just decided to go to SPS because one of my long time friend/classmate/study-buddy Ayush would also

go there and it was closer to my house. In addition, I might have not been able to get to Mellon in time if I went to Desi Public School as it was very far from home.

So now, the stage was set for me. Although there were a fair share of plot-twists that would await me, I'm very grateful that I chose the Mellon Indiranagar + SPS-Koramangala combo, but only for one reason - the people I would meet!

Chapter 2

New Beginnings: School & Coaching

Until April 2019, I had been in the same school for the last ten years. However, most years I used to get put in an entirely new section with a new group of students. When it was happening, it used to be very frustrating but it made me quite comfortable making new friends. This really helped me not get overwhelmed at the start of 11th - when everything was new: my school, my coaching and my priorities.

My first day in Mellon Indiranagar was a regular first day to any Mellon year - the teachers gave their motivation and guidance talk and soon after that they started with the course. We could choose to attend classes either in April or May and take the other month off as summer vacation. Most took April off and started classes from May but I had NTSE Stage-II in May so I decided to do Mellon JEE in April. So in that summer break I would go to Jayanagar during the day for NTSE Stage-II prep and then to Mellon Indiranagar in the evenings for JEE prep. NTSE Stage-II prep was lots of fun but unfortunately I didn't clear the exam, I missed the cut-off by a mark! But back to the point, Mellon April Batch was just 4 people and it was a very relaxed one month, it eased us into JEE prep.

From June, Apr and May batches were combined into what was called "Weekday Evening JEE Mains + Advanced Batch", and also SPS started. SPS (Strict Public School) is notorious for being a very strict school, one where there is only studying. My friends had warned me that I wouldn't like SPS, coming from DWH.

My first month in SPS was quite a rollercoaster. In the first week, all the new kids really despised the school and couldn't wrap their head around the rules. However, for Liam and I, (a friend who also just joined SPS) it was quite fine. For us, it was in the second or third week of school that it hit us. I think in the first week, the expectations were so low that it was comparatively quite alright but as time passed, the ridiculously strict rules, regulations and policies became a pain to deal

with. In addition to this, we were introduced to the Devil's Duo - the cause of most things I disliked about SPS. These two teachers were horrible. Horrible is an understatement. Seemed like the only time they enjoyed life was when they got to shout at and bully students. But then because of this (something I would come to realise the importance of only later on) everyone were friends in our class. Everyone was faced with the same amount of shit, and we'd make more than enough jokes and have great fun everywhere to make up for the annoyance with the school. By the end of the first month, it was the new normal. Not something anyone really enjoyed but it was much more tolerable after the initial shock.

In the middle of all this, I started using most of my school time to either solve JEE work or read the newspaper. I was not at all interested in what SPS had to teach, because they didn't seem too interested in teaching - it was again all about exams and marks there. The class was divided into three sections - the front row students who cared about their marks because they were going to apply abroad, the middle row students who paid attention sometimes, and the backbenchers who didn't pay any attention and were studying something else. Ayush and I became semi-backbenchers. Not proper backbenchers because whenever there was too much noise in class, the backbenchers would get called outside and this would waste a lot of our time. Apart from that, I kept waiting for PE period. We used to play "New Kids vs Old Kids" and it was a lot of fun.

Sometime around July/August, I had been moved to the SRG batch in Mellon. Overnight shift from NG [head of the regular Weekday batch who was a clown in his own right] shithousery to Chabs shithousery. It was basically just a batch with students who were taking JEE seriously and would thus have more classes and be given a lot more work to do. At this point, I was really enjoying Mellon. The teachers were good, I was taking it seriously and my SPS + Mellon + DD friends [prO gang, ie, me, Sanskar, Liam & Sai] had a lot of fun together. Note: DD is Diamond District, the apartment we live in. A place very close to my heart. Anyways, we had fun everywhere - the SPS bus [K-12], Mellon's break time in between class, the auto back home from Mellon at night or our outings on Friday night after Mellon. We used to either go to a Taco Bell close by or we used to walk back home and

stop and eat momos at every vendor on 100ft road. However, joining SRG brought a problem with it - the workload was ridiculous, it was tough to cope up with.

That's when we decided to try shifting to Mellon Integrated. Long story short, that failed but one good thing that did come out of it was that the SPS principal (who was one of the nicest people in SPS) did say that I could take occasional holidays from school when the JEE work got too crazy and focus on finishing it that day. Even during school, she indirectly told me that I could spend time on JEE as long as my SPS marks didn't seriously fall. I am so happy that I wasn't able to go to Integrated because most of my learning and doubt clearing would happen from my friends in school. During SPS' first semester exams, it was awesome to see how many holidays they gave us before/during the period. It was also during this time that we (JEE students in SPS) discovered the magic of Indian Educational YouTubers and last minute preparation to manage a 75%+ in the exam. Indian YouTubers would soon become the reason we were able to learn anything.

Apart from this, at home I was having fun. Playing football in the evenings when I didn't have Mellon classes with my apartment friends was too much fun. DD Football was definitely one of the best parts of the week. Also, my friend Vedu and I would watch every FC Barcelona game together and have a lot of fun doing so. I would always plan to bunk school the day there was a Barca game.

By this time though, I was in a routine. I'd wake up for school at 7:00AM and get ready to take the school bus. School started at 8:00AM and would finish at 3:00PM. From there I would take an auto and go back home, I couldn't wait for the school bus because our bus used to leave last and that would delay me too much. I would get home around 3.30PM, and that was one of the best parts of my day. My mother was a college professor and her classes would also end around 3:00PM. She used to rush back home everyday so that we could spend ten minutes together before I left for Mellon. She would quickly make dosas for me, while I changed uniforms and freshened up a little. This was such a great way to recharge for me. In fact, I used to be quite annoyed on days when I couldn't see her at that time! Anyways, right after that I would leave for Mellon around 3:45PM because my classes would start

from 4:00PM. They would end at 8:15PM, but it would be almost 8:45-9:00 PM by the time I got back home because we had a carpool on the way back. Then I would exercise, eat dinner, try to study for a bit (worked 50% of the days I'd say) and go to bed by 11:00PM. It was very hectic but there was a lot of fun also involved.

Next, were our Dussehra breaks.

Chapter 3

Friends, Events & JEE Jokes

Come Dussehra breaks, I thought this would be a rather chilled out week. Not in terms of academic workload, but mainly just in terms of waking up an hour or two later than usual and maybe eating meals while watching TV. Mr. Chabs (Mellon teacher) had a slightly different plan for us. Seeing as we didn't have school for the next two weeks, he decided to tinker with our class timings. It went from 4hrs, four times a week --> 8hrs, six days a week! On first hearing that we'd have daily classes from 8:00AM to 3:00PM even during Dussehra breaks, I was bummed out.

And then something I had not anticipated happened - those two weeks of classes were so much fun, and it was the birthplace for memes, groups and observations that would keep us sane for the year to come. Let me take you through one of those days:

8:00AM, we'd have maths class with Chabs and it was combined with another batch [A1]. This is where we discovered the true meme of Chabs, something that is indescribable and only something one can experience [I will include material at the end to give you a slight taste].

After that, we'd have physics with Shreyyas, a class we all enjoyed and actually did more learning than laughing.

Then it was lunch break, THE lunch break. All of us from the SRG batch would run to a close by Udupi Park and order some food and have a splendid half an hour chatting, eating and laughing.

Next, we would have chemistry with enol. For us, it was our post-lunch nap session. One of us would stay up, understand and then explain to the others.

The most important thing that came out of this time was the 'formation of Lon'. Lon was what the six of us called ourselves; no sense to the name, only that Chabs hated the word. "Physics wale naalayak log isko lon bolte hai, but in reality it is

LN." In the evenings, I'd study, play some football, walk our neighbour's dog and chill out. This was how my Dussehra breaks went - not something I expected, something that could've easily been a nightmare, but something I ended up enjoying a lot.

After this, our school started once again, it was time for the second semester. This is one instance that I can never forget - Liam and I had just got off the bus to enter school the first day after vacation. We'd made the fatal mistake of forgetting how much we hated going to SPS. We were all happy and cheerful, but then, the second we stepped inside the premises, we heard the PT teacher's whistle blowing. In an instant, the look on our faces changed completely. We both looked at each other: "Oh no, please, not this again!!". I don't want to dwell on the negatives too much but school was horrible. It was unnecessarily strict, the Devil's Duo abused their power and there was just nothing about the school in itself that was "fun".

Although that part never changed, it is pretty ironic because it was in that second semester of 11th that we really enjoyed our time in school. Our class (11A gang) gelled together incredibly well and we'd all enjoy doing the stupidest things together - Acting like GS (general studies) was the most important subject in the world, watching Gaur Gopal Das and Jimmy Neutron videos in class on the projector, singing the school song and national anthem in assembly, shamelessly begging teachers for PE periods, etc. Also during this time, there were a few events also going on that everyone got involved in. There was SPS' sports day for which we had to do some drill and we loved it because it meant we got to miss classes. Also there were a couple of fests [Vivum and Ignite] that our school went for. My friends and I went as part of the football team, and although we didn't win anything, we had a lot of fun. For me personally, Ignite and SPS' inter house were the highlights. Ignite because I got to visit my old school DWH, meet my football coach and old friends. SPS' inter house because I thought I played well and in a way "introduced" myself to SPS as a quality footballer. A few other events were there that we took part in - alumni football match, SPS tech fest and a random football tournament.

Another notable mention is the Diwali vacations, where Mellon was once again going to put on classes but we [my family and I] had planned to go to Goa for a couple of days with our cousins. I told Chabs that I won't be able to attend classes for a couple of days because I am going to Goa. He absolutely freaked out, almost as if I'd committed a crime. He said, "GOA KYUN JA RAHE HO?!". I don't know how this struck my mind but I cooked up a story about how our grandparents stay in Goa and every year we go and celebrate the "most religious festival" Diwali, with them. Since he's a devout Hindu and extremely orthodox, his stance suddenly changed to "Okay beta, no problem. In fact, everyone take 3 days holiday and celebrate Diwali. We will not have classes." A nerve-racking moment for me, but I got to go to Goa, and I had a blast with all my cousins!

During this semester (Oct 2019 to Jan 2020), I was having lots of fun. However, this isn't to say that I wasn't studying hard. In hindsight, I'm mostly only able to recall the enjoyable parts, but in reality those months were extremely hectic. The teaching speed at Mellon ramped up significantly owing to how many school holidays were there in that period. Every couple of weeks, we'd have a test and this test was taken very seriously by those JEE-focused. I'm glad I took those tests seriously but they were grueling. Everyday in school, apart from the one or two hours of fun, it was four-five hours of trying to sneak in JEE work, clearing my doubts and helping others with their doubts between classes. As it is, solving JEE material requires high focus, but there was an added pressure of being alert enough in class to not get caught doing JEE work or else your books would be thrown away. Yes, thrown away - the Devil's Duo had no respect for anything.

But a few of us did manage to optimize our process the best we could. I realised the importance of studying with my friends as they could clear so many of my doubts and teach me new ways. Although teachers say "you can ask me anything I will explain", that's very rarely the case. You could, for all practical purposes, get only 1/10 of your doubts cleared by Chabs. In school, I realised having your Mellon's modules (which are brightly coloured) + a notebook to solve those questions + having the textbook of the class you're in + having that subject's notebook, all on one desk was very risky, inconvenient and inefficient. So what I

decided to do was - every night, I would compile the questions I had to do the next day on my laptop, and then print it onto an A4 sheet. During class, I would solve the questions in my current class' subject's notebook. This made it seem like I was noting down what the teacher said and it was very tough for them to make out that a random piece of paper on my desk were JEE questions. Of course, this had its risks too, but I was far more efficient and wasn't too worried about getting caught. Even if I did, worst case they'd scold me and tear one page. Honestly, I couldn't care less, to the point where even if I didn't have/want to do any JEE work that day in school, I would sit and read the newspaper just because I didn't want to listen in class.

Similar to the Dussehra breaks and first semester exams, we had Mellon class during Christmas breaks and the second semester (finals) exams got over by Jan/Feb. Another anecdote - I remember that I hadn't actually focused in any lab class during the year, so one day before the lab exam, I would binge watch some Indian youtubers [Amrita oLabs for physics and anyone who gave edgy mnemonics in Hindi to help with chem]. I managed to do decently well. And of course, a little bit of help given/taken via information exchange during the exam.

During this time, I had got into a routine. I feel like intensity is given way too much importance during JEE preparation, when the actual key is consistency. All the people I studied with, none of them studied 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. There were days where we didn't feel like studying, or that we felt like studying but just weren't able to solve anything. We might've got caught up texting some friends, watching some TV/movie, or just felt like sleeping early. And this happened quite often - twice a week at the very least I'd say. In reality I don't think anyone would've studied more than 25hrs/week [excluding classes] with school on the side. But here's the part I think we all did very well - we never let the hours/days of unproductivity lead to further unproductivity. If it was a lazy Sunday morning and we didn't open a book till lunch, it'd just be till there - it wouldn't lead to an unproductive evening as well. Funnily enough, it often did - but then we'd try our best to get back on the horse the next morning. Many of my classmates gave up because this frequent mental battle of wanting to continue relaxing vs pushing

yourself to get back to work is frankly very tiring. It definitely gets easier the more you do it, but it's still a task. This, I would say was one of the best things I did during my two years of JEE prep - didn't give up and stayed there. I definitely gave up at times, had setbacks, but after a couple of days I got back on track.

My body was used to this and while it wasn't the most pleasant thing in the world, I was confident that I could keep this up for another year or so. Coping mechanisms for different problems, ways to alter where I would give my time/energy to maintain balances and a good friend group everywhere I went had been established. 12th grade was about to begin - the most important year of my "youth" life!

Chapter 4

Covid-19, Plot Twists & Recalibrating

12th grade begins. In Mellon, everything was the same - classes, teachers, rules, etc. In school, lots of things changed. The two sections were re-shuffled based on the student's elective subject. While my new class was no 11A, many of my friends were still there so it was enough. Our teachers changed. This was the biggest change. Our class no longer had the Devil's Duo! It made school life so much more fun, all of our teachers were nice and not too strict. 12th graders were often allowed to forgo silly rules that we were forced to follow in 11th. All in all, I had started enjoying coming to school. SPS was no longer dreadful.

But the universe just couldn't accept that, how were students not hating the school?! Within a couple of days of 12th starting, the Covid-19 pandemic became rampant in Bangalore. One of those days, we were randomly told during the short break, "Pack up your bags, you're going back home. Buses leave in 10 minutes." I remember telling my friends as soon as I got on the bus, "Just when I started enjoying SPS, school's been cancelled. This sucks!" We all reasoned that this is at best going to last a few weeks and that it's a welcome break considering we will barely get any summer breaks this year. Read further to see if Covid lasted for more than a few weeks xD.

So I was at home, with no Mellon (they had cancelled classes too) and no school. I decided to try and revise the entire 11th grade JEE syllabus in the next couple of weeks. I had the 42yr PYQ book and decided to solve the questions older than 2010 as a way to revise. While 2-3 weeks turned out to be too short a time to revise the entire 11th syllabus for the first time thoroughly, I did re-familiarize myself with everything. In later months, I would go on to revise this syllabus several more times, until I finally reached an acceptable level of proficiency. Regardless, these initial few weeks of no school and no Mellon really allowed me to revise old concepts and have my basics strong before I started with the 12th portions. Also, in these months, I really ramped up playing football in DD, joined an MMA gym and

ironically enough, I was getting more exercise and outdoor activity than I did all of last year.

After a few weeks, when it didn't seem Covid was going away anytime soon, our school organised a few online classes. It wouldn't have been for longer than a week before they just told us to take April and May off as summer breaks and finish writing our records during that time. Towards the end of March, Mellon also started. Along with this, a lockdown was declared in Bangalore. Suddenly, I was at home 24hrs a day - something I was not at all used to. Mellon classes + assignments were not too hectic in the first month online because it was just the start of 12th and everyone was figuring out how to go about the current situation. I'd spend around 6-7hrs a day on JEE during April/May, which is not too little but not too much either. The problem was that now I suddenly had 17-18hrs a day to spend by myself. I took this opportunity and increased my sleep hours. Even then, I had 6-7hrs a day to do something else.

Usually, you can always find something to do but it'll involve going out, friends, classes, activities etc. Now none of this was possible. So I thought a little harder and decided to do something related to two of my most favourite things in the world - football and animals. On the footballing front, I opened a football analysis blog. I would write about some tactics, analysis, or anything football related everyday and I really started enjoying this. On the animal front, I started taking my neighbour's (who is practically shared by both families) dog for a walk everyday. It was something I had always done, but only on weekends. Now I would do it everyday. Her name is Charlotte, she's a shy, brown indie with the eyes of an angel. She's absolutely gorgeous. I'm a huge fan of indies, so another thing my entire family picked up was feeding all the dogs around our apartment (15-20 dogs) everyday. They usually live off of roadside shops' discarded food, leftovers from restaurants or some biscuits from passersby. All of this had disappeared. So every day, my mother would cook the food, my father would take me around to the different feeding spots on his scooter and I would feed the dogs. I honestly think these few hours spent with animals everyday were the reason I had a relatively easy time adjusting to the 'new normal'. The affection and excitement when they

see you is unmatched - and something that could turn any kind of day into a good one.

There were two more important things that I spent time on during these months. The first was our Mellon group chat - Lon. We were all free, good friends, and ever ready to troll each other/special teachers. Although we already spoke a lot, it was mostly study related until now. But, boy did things change! Now we would talk about pretty much everything under the sun throughout the day. If you didn't open the chat for a day, there would easily be 1000+ messages. A brotherhood had been formed, and it was one of the best things that came out of JEE. Secondly, a lot of European football had restarted and to make up for the months of lost time, they increased the frequency of games. Almost 3-4 days a week there would be a game Vedu and I would want to watch. By this time, my sister Inika had also gotten into watching football, so the three of us used to watch all the games together and had an exceptional time every game.

During this summer break, I fell for a classic YouTube scam. All these “educational influencers” [Manam Khattarwal types] realised that people were at home, and idle, so it was time to start pumping out content. They started putting out infinite videos about how ‘college degrees are a scam’, ‘jobs are for losers’, ‘the only way to be happy in life is if you have a start-up’, ‘oh look at these five examples of people who left traditional education and are killing it in freelancing’ etc. With all the uncertainty in that first month of lockdown, I got manipulated by this and decided to stop preparing for JEE. I told my parents that I won’t go to college, and that I will start a company to help stray dogs across the country. Being good parents, they tried to talk sense into me, but this failed. I got emotional and angry that they were “crushing my dreams and forcing me to live a horrible life”. Being great parents, they probably understood that I was going through something, so they took a step back, and told me that whatever I chose to do, they’d be there to support me. Two days later, I was back to JEE prep. The reason I chose to include this story is to once again emphasize on the incredible support I had from my parents, which allowed me to be so vulnerable one day, but back on the grind the very next.

This was how my summer breaks of 2020 went - studying and figuring my way around Covid. Although the studying wasn't really intense at all, it was consistent. Everyday I'd spend time on JEE.

In June, SPS' online classes began and my daily routine (timings wise) was similar to what it was before Covid. Also by this time we started playing football in DD again, something I looked forward to doing everyday. As it was, in SPS physical classes I barely paid any attention, and now in online classes I paid none. I spent all that time on JEE work. It wasn't the most productive because you had to keep the school class on at the side in case your name was called. I still managed to get a decent amount out of it. Because this new format of life was a lot less physically demanding, I was also getting a little less organised and it was easier to get distracted while learning online. To combat that I tried making an hourly plan for everyday. While it wasn't perfect, it definitely helped me. Also, by now our maths teacher was an absolute joke and I stopped attending his classes for maths - I started watching lessons on YouTube or the centrally recorded ones Mellon put on their portal. However, we all attended his classes for the laughter. Unbelievable. The amount of laughing emojis on our group chat in that one hour was a sight to behold. To make up for his incompetence, at night we (Lon) started having common discussions to clear each other's doubts and concepts. Looking back, I would say group studies with the right people are an absolute game changer.

As time went on, our physics teacher kept changing and we didn't get a good teacher. So for physics I also started watching recorded lectures. Our chem teacher was overworked and didn't have enough time for our class, so in chem we started lagging behind. I didn't want that to happen, so I also started watching recorded lectures here. Eventually by July/Aug, more than 75% of my studies would happen either individually or with Lon. The rest 15% with other friends like Ayush and Liam and maybe 10% through our teachers (mostly in the form of doubt clearances).

Chapter 5

Ramping Up The Intensity

I thought things were going decently well, my test marks were going down slightly but I hadn't really paid attention to it. But there was this one test, I'm not sure exactly which one but it was one of the Mellon Major tests, where I did very badly. There was a significant gap between my marks and those of the rest of my classmates. I felt helpless and thought that despite studying so hard, the gap between me and my peers was just increasing.

I remember when I had got the results for that test, something inside me was really worried. I felt like I was losing seriousness, which was true. I was ditching classes to go play football, I would ditch studies often to go hang out with friends, etc. Until now though, a decent score in the tests used to cover up all these glaring holes in my preparation but this test almost "exposed" me. I decided that it was time to make a decision, and the decision I chose to make was to take JEE seriously henceforth. To do away with all the fun and games.

While I'm not usually a huge fan of making radical changes in an emotional state, in that moment some kind of a switch flipped in my mind. I went from "yeah JEE is going on" to "no JEE is not just 'going on', there is a lot of improvement left to be made and it's now or never, so it better be now." I started cutting out pretty much everything. It started with me leaving the DD football whatsapp group chat because I knew I couldn't control myself, and the only way was to remove myself from the situation. Also, I deleted all forms of social media (except Whatsapp) and decided to stop my football and animal blog. I would still continue feeding the dogs and walking Charlotte, but that was it. No more going out with friends and minimising wasting time texting them. My sleep schedule became a lot more rigid and I was hell-bent on making the most of my school hours (which previously were often spent on YT or general loafing).

Although these were big changes, they didn't really feel big because in my mind, this was the bare minimum I had to do to have any chance of doing well in JEE. I think this was sometime around August, so I had 5-6 months before my first JEE Mains Exam. Anyways, I spoke to my mother about these changes and she was very encouraging and supportive as usual. I sat down with her and tried formulating a brief plan, with the intention to make the most out of each day. Ultimately we came up with a plan to study 10-12hrs theoretically. It was, of course, inclusive of classes, because I had stopped attending Mellon live classes by then and watching the recorded sessions was something I would have to plan for myself.

My sleep schedule became more rigid and I started skipping occasional Barca games that weren't the most important. The next six months were the most intense part of my JEE preparation. I'm very glad I put in the hours there, but looking back, there's no way I would want to do it again. It wasn't some 'rosy memory'. However, I must acknowledge how much easier my family made it for me to do it. My mother would have the most tasty meals ready at exactly the times we had decided so that I was not delayed and was recharged after a delicious meal. My sister didn't stir up any unnecessary fights that would distract me from my studies - she never fought for the TV, fought to go on vacation or generally fought against things being done on my schedule in those months. My father wasn't too involved but he would make sure there was never any shortage of ginger biscuits and mixed-fruit juice, two things I loved. In addition to this, having friends go through the same thing as you and being able to talk to them about the goods, bads and okays of the process was also very comforting. This is one place Lon shined (and still shines to this day) - we're all there for each other and are very open about things. None of us want to get one over another, we all want to see each other do well. Last honourable mention - all the dogs I interacted with (mainly Charlotte and Bandar). Being greeted by them is an absolute energy booster. It's just amazing!

Along with my 12th grade studies, I started revising 11th grade simultaneously from as early as August. I feel like this was a game changing factor. The multiple

revisions of the entire syllabus made me very comfortable switching from chapter to chapter in the exam. Anyways, for physics I used Physics Galaxy's Checklist videos, where I also made short notes. For Chemistry, I used Pahul's Catalyse Revision + Adv Que solving videos. For chem, I started making short notes from NCERT + Module at this time. And finally for maths, I just practiced previous year JEE Mains questions and made short notes from the Module. We (Lon) started having frequent discussions about topics we had decided to revise and questions we did from those topics.

On the school front, classes were still going on and tests came and went, but I was not bothered about them. One of the things I really hated was that none of the SAT students (who can easily listen in class) would ever respond in class. I hated the fact that the teacher's wouldn't get a response from the students while teaching and it was just very tough for them as it was their first time teaching online as well. There were some weeks when Liam and I did our best to answer everything in class, but it wasn't too feasible with our JEE prep. I did feel bad about not responding when the teacher asked basic questions like "Are you there?" but it was something I had to do at the time. The rationalisation I did in my mind was that at the end of 12th, the teacher would much rather see me in a good college and accept my apology for inactivity in class rather than be the reason I wasn't in a good college but have got a couple extra answers from me during the classes. Not sure how good the reasoning is, but in my mind it made enough sense for me to move past the guilt and onto studying.

Another thing I remember is that every night I used to be exhausted and just before sleeping, my parents and I would watch one episode of Schitt's Creek, which was a lot of fun. This hectic routine went on till around December end. By then we had finished all the syllabus and finished revising it a few times. We would now enter 2021, a year of only doing papers. The routine that would be set was: if it was a mains paper, in the morning we (Lon) would do that paper, analyse it in the afternoon+evening and then discuss it at night. 90% of our doubts would get cleared here but if any were left over, we'd send it to the teachers. If it was an

advanced paper, first day we would do both papers and second we would analyse both and discuss both that night. The papers were actually a boon because now we could work in shorter periods, but with higher intensity. In December, we did some old Mellon score papers. In Jan we did JEE Mains 2019 papers, and in Feb we did JEE Mains 2020 papers.

A week before my mains, I stopped doing papers and started revising the theory. Previous year papers turned out to be a golden key to Mains. It made doing the paper almost into an algorithm, which is a lot easier to execute as compared to figuring your way around the paper each time, not knowing what to expect. Two days before my Mains, I switched off my phone, closed my books and just proceeded to have fun. Here's what I had written in a day before mains:

“My mental state keeps varying. When I start studying I get pretty stressed out, but otherwise it's all good. I am happy that Anup Sir Mathongo advised against looking at today's papers because it's likely to just make me stressed. Writing this at 12pm when I have finished all my revisions. I don't plan on opening YouTube or my phone till mains gets over. Rest of the time is charlotte, boxing and impractical jokers.

What I actually did after 12: put on country instrumental music, bathed and walked charlotte, did some boxing and football, watched a game with Inika and binged on IJ. 7pm - starting to get a little nervous, just watched 1 analysis to get a slight idea that math was tough, as it usually is. For my nervousness, there's nothing to do about it but embrace it. Take in the moment and think about how fortunate you are to be in this situation. How many people don't even have a chance to write an exam to study further, they are forced to work day in day out just to make a living.

Tomorrow, laser focus. ”

I will cover the day of my Feb (1st) Mains in the next chapter, but concluding on this phase of my journey - it was obviously a very hectic few months, I'd be exhausted every night but I also think this was required to jump levels from where

I initially was to where I was able to reach. I forgot to mention this earlier but in Jan, we had the KVPY exam. Few days before it, we (Lon) went through the previous year papers which I think helped a lot. The pattern and style of questions are different from JEE but going through some previous year papers familiarised you with everything. Eventually, I did clear KVPY with an AIR 818, and am currently a KVPY scholar.

Chapter 6

Mains, Advanced Prep & BITSAT

Let me set the scene for my first JEE Mains. The centre was an hour's drive from home. I was very happy about that because I love drives, especially before exams. My father and I listened (a tradition of sorts) to Blues Instrumental music on the way to the exam centre. In the exam centre, first you finish all the formalities and then you are seated in front of your computer and have half an hour to kill. That goes by relatively easily, and by that time you're completely in the zone. I was not nervous or fidgety, I was ready. I always treated it like a football match, and under Sudhakar sir, showing up in big games was a necessity. It was something that had been beaten into us.

How did my Mains actually go? This is what I thought right after:

“A lot to say. It went well I think. I can't remember too much because I'm typing this the next day. During the exam I had no idea what was happening, I was on auto-pilot. Whatever I did was almost entirely muscle memory, there was no time to think of anything. Also visited sudhakar sir today which was lots of fun.”

I think that's a very fair assessment of how my mains went. The next day Vedantu came out with their “memory based answer key” for my shift and I checked my marks - I had got 247/300. I had made a couple of silly mistakes that could have been avoided but all-in-all I was very happy with my performance and expected a great result (around 99.6-99.7 percentile). I'm not great at building up suspense so I'll skip right to the moment when the results come. I was downstairs hanging out with my friends because I was feeling very nervous and anxious at home. Then, my father called one of my friends and asked me to come up. When I did, he broke the news to me that I had got 99.896 percentile. We (family) were all very happy and went out to eat paan. It was a memorable day because it was the first time in two years that I saw any fruit from all the preparation and long hours I'd put in.

After this result, I could get CS at NIT-Surathkal, which meant I didn't need to study for any of the coming mains and could shift my preparation to advance-focused. Thus began my advanced preparation. Before this, from December I had started preparing a few topics at advanced level. So the first thing I did was cover all the advanced theory in the form of notes and made sure I knew the syllabus.

Then I tried doing chapter wise detailed preparation but I don't know why that made me so nervous and gave me so much anxiety. I was just always worried about not doing enough and not finishing in time. Finally, I gave up on chapter wise preparation and decided to do full syllabus papers. Also, at this time, few people from Lon had got selected for an SSRG batch and were following what was being told there. This left Kapu and I to do what we want and to carve a path out for ourselves. Luckily, we both were serious about Adv prep and wanted to do only papers. So we decided to do two Adv papers on Day 1, analyse and discuss on Day 2 and then repeat this cycle for two months. By May end (when our Advanced was initially supposed to be), we'd be ready. Searching for the papers was a task in itself - we didn't know what papers were good ones to do and which ones were to be avoided. I remember asking on Quora and getting moderately helpful answers, but still nothing concrete. So then we tried to find some stuff online but then randomly one day, Chabs told us he'd send us papers. We did a few of his papers but then found a Google Drive online with all the MIITJAA AITS papers from 2020. We started doing a combination of Mellon Score, MIITJAA AITS and JEE Advanced PY papers.

This was an incredibly efficient plan. Everyday we'd study for six uninterrupted hours, solving 100+ questions. The next day we'd analyse these questions, learn weak topics and discuss our doubts. We both really enjoyed the "free productivity" we earned by doing two papers. We were in the routine so two papers weren't anything hectic. We were ready to do this till May. But of course, as always, when things would get settled and I would be in the flow, plot twists would happen.

Suddenly there was a second wave of Covid, and it was bad. All exams were indefinitely postponed, we were once again locked down at home and there was uncertainty everywhere. However, we didn't let this affect us too much. The "IIT dream" was enough to get us to continue studying past May. Similarly, June went by. It was the same exact routine everyday. I didn't particularly hate it or like it, it was just something I had to do everyday. Same story with July, except that's when the BITSAT date (Aug 3) got announced so we started studying for it.

For BITSAT, Kapu and I got Mathongo's test series and decided to solve that. Later, we also found a few other friends (Ayush, Sinha, Garg, Parth) who had taken the test series so we formed a group with all of us and used to clear each other's doubts. BITSAT was supposed to be an exam where the questions were quite easy but you had to get 162 of them in 180 minutes with a +3/-1 marking. It was more about the art of paper solving since our knowledge base was already up to the mark thanks to our JEE Mains + Adv prep. At the start of July, we were balancing JEE/BITSAT prep but towards the middle-end of July, we entirely shifted to BITSAT. This exam was a huge deal to me. Since JEE-Adv was nowhere in sight, having secured a seat in BITS (the only college at the level of IITs) was very important. In our minds, 'If BITSAT goes well, then we can chill and take JEE Advanced prep a little easier'. More than anything, it was for mental peace in a growingly frustrating JEE-Advanced environment.

This 'growingly frustrating JEE-Adv environment' was quite important in the context. We had been studying mindlessly for the last four months with no end date in mind. The education ministry had been changed and there was no update about anything. Towards the end of July, we were reaching a point where even doing another few weeks of Advanced prep seemed like it would be an awfully tiring task. We were desperately hoping they would declare that the exam would be conducted in August. Having to do another two months and have the exam in September seemed like the absolute worst case, and quite improbable because there was no reason to push it so far away.

But guess what happened? They pushed the exam all the way back to OCTOBER!

To free ourselves from a lot of this worry, having BITS as a back-up would be a great position to be in. As a result, I was quite nervous before my BITSAT. More nervous than I'd been before any exam. My ideal goal would be to get 390+, a great goal would be 380+ and 370+ was the bare minimum in my mind.

It was the day of the BITSAT exam. All the exam day rituals were done and I was ready for the exam. I felt nervous knowing that a lot was riding on this but I was also confident in my preparation. The exam starts, and once again I go on auto-pilot. However, this time there isn't that much 'auto' because I'm trying to be very conscious about everything to avoid silly mistakes. The exam went on for three hours and I was able to complete everything. Right after I submitted the exam, my score flashed on the screen: You have secured 370 marks. In all honesty, I was quite disappointed initially. I was happy because the exam, objectively speaking, did go quite well but not as great according to my expectations.

Anyways, a few days removed from the exam, I felt a lot better about my score. With 370 marks I got into BITS-Goa CS, and there was still a slight possibility of Pilani CS. I will share a detailed college decision article I wrote further on, but after initial research I found out that BITS Goa CS is great, in fact it is pretty much on the same level as Pilani CS. Both have certain pros and cons. This made me feel a lot better.

After my BITSAT I had taken a few days off. I met some friends (Priyam, Ayush, Arnav, Turanyu, YK etc) and had lots of fun. Also, by this time, the BITS branch/campus preference order was to be filled so it was time for me to start doing some serious college research. As a start, I looked every online - found a FB group BITSAT Queries which was helpful. Apart from that I spoke to our neighbour Nitin, Ashish Mausu, Mahad Fufa, Amit Fufa and Arun Appa Uncle. Also, I managed to connect to a few BITS-G CS seniors. I learnt a lot, mainly that branch matters. Something I initially thought didn't matter at all.

Simultaneously, I stopped feeling like studying for Advanced because there was simply no motivation anymore. I started despising it. Here is an article I had written (to make myself feel better about not feeling like studying anymore) describing the above few paragraphs in detail:

“

Picking a College – The Stress!

At the start of 11th, I went down the engineering path. Here, last month into our 6 month extended 12th grade, I’m in a huge amount of stress despite having done well in the exams and actually having quite good options.

First, my options:

1. BITS Pilani CS – Mostly BITS Goa but a small chance of BITS Pilani
2. NIT-K CS
3. IIT-B Core Branch

Before I talk about where I stand, let me take you through the various aspects that I will keep in mind while picking a college and how BITS CS/IIT Core compare across the two. All this data has been taken from a wide range of people I spoke to, across the internet, several seniors from both colleges, as well as my own analysis.

1. Placements – Here BITS is superior simply because it is a CS branch. This is not to say that IIT is not good, but the general idea has been that you will have to build a non-core profile and go into IT/finance/consulting/analytics etc. Being from a CS branch you will have a lot more internships and companies available to get into.
2. Masters Abroad – Here IIT has an edge. BITS will have the small advantage that you have already done your BE in CS and can spend more time on learning deeper in that field, while IIT will have a much better brand value and research facilities. It would largely depend on what you do during your time in college.

3. MBA in India – Here both are similar as they are categorized in the tier-1 of engineering colleges and other factors like CAT score, resume etc. matter more.
4. Alumni Network – Here, obviously IIT trumps BITS. Simply a numbers game, way more IITians than BITSians. However, I have read that the BITSAA is very active and very helpful – which would definitely make up (at least some ground) for the lack of numbers.
5. Tag – Another no-brainer where IIT wins. The tag is simply unmatched, it makes your stomach gurgle to imagine saying “I’m an IIT grad”. But here again, BITS Pilani, Pilani campus is also widely respected across all those involved in the academic/tech community, it is only amongst general janta that is not regarded well. Bits Pilani, Goa tag is definitely not close to the IIT/Pilani tag.
6. Opportunities – Two sides to a coin. BITS will provide a lot more IT opportunities simply because you are in the CS dept such as PS, whereas IIT can provide a lot more non-core opportunities. Here, the specific opportunities will be slightly different but in a broad stroke, both places provide ample opportunities.
7. Peer Group – Here, again it’s quite similar, but in different ways. BITS CS will have students who specially chose that seat over IIT Core, hence people will be very mindful and interested in CS. Apart from that, the no reservation policy might make up for the other folks having a relatively lower rank in JEE-Adv. IIT, on the other hand, has the best peer group in the country – bar none. It is the cream of the crop. However, I would not put it on a pedestal considering that most people are just there to “be an IITian” and might not be any more ambitious than a BITS undergrad.

8. Campus Life – I would say BITS has a slight edge here because of two reasons. First being their relatively eased policies for attendance/timetables, and second the fact that you will only be focused on one major, whereas in IIT you would have to focus on your core subject + non-core profile. I think other factors like location, peers, sports facilities, coaches etc. would all eventually balance out and anyways can't be predicted accurately.

9. Entrepreneurship – Here both are similar and while being from an IIT will definitely have an advantage in the long run, it is not that BITS lacks behind in any real sense.

10. Time to explore new things – Here I think BITS would have an edge because you are already doing all the fundamentals as your course, and you can learn anything you want in your free time. In IIT, although the opportunities might be a little more, I think it would get nullified because a majority of your free time would go into building a non-core profile.

11. Future – Here, of course, it's ultimately dependent on you but strictly financially speaking – I've been told that the odds of landing a higher paying job in a tech firm are much greater if you are a CS grad. Also, speaking to people, if you want a career in CS related fields, then opportunities are the same everywhere and the IIT tag does not really hold much value.

12. BITS Goa vs Pilani – Here there are more non-core opportunities in Pilani, but for CS dept, what I've heard is that both are very similar and other things like Goa vs Pilani city, peers, etc etc will in most cases just balance out.

Now, here's where my interests lie –

Before I do, a disclaimer – I know my academic interests can change in college, but I also feel like that's so unpredictable and there is also a solid chance that my interest might not change (it hasn't over the last 4 years). I feel like the best I can do right now is go based on what I'm currently interested in and if it does change in the future, I will work from there. Luckily, all my options allow me to explore new areas and are not limited.

Currently, I am interested in computers and tech. I feel like learning everything possible in those fields and I would love to keep building projects in it. I feel like my strengths are my leadership, proactiveness and problem solving skills. Ideally I would like to solve regular day problems via technology. The whole leadership path, I think, is something that can be gotten into only after you have a certain amount of experience and isn't something I need to worry about now.

Another thing I have understood from multiple sources is that the only thing worth striving for is excellence in what you do. Everything else will follow. I think I can gain excellence with time on my hands and interest in my field. All this sounds like BITS would be my ideal college, but there's that nagging part inside my brain that won't stop thinking "but the IIT tag". I will rationalize it as more opportunities or better alumni, but I feel like it is just the thrill of having respect in society.

At this juncture, most people I've spoken to have said that the difference between college/branch is a 9v10 but the effort that you will put into it will magnify the outcome greatly. You are much better off putting 80% effort into a 9 than 50% effort into a 10.

A little bit unorthodox but something I want to prioritize is my mental peace and contentment. It is something I have done till now, but it was something that I was

very lucky about. My surroundings (parents, friends etc.) facilitated my mental peace and happiness. It was always in conjunction with doing better things. Never this or that. I do feel like as I grow up and have to make bigger life decisions, I will have to make a bigger and more conscious decision on what I prioritize, and here, choosing one will quite often mean missing out on something else. Now this is just a prediction but from my current seat what I feel like is – joining an IIT core will bring more stress with it. The stress of figuring out what you want to do, the stress of a ‘low paying’ first job when you could’ve easily gotten a better one at BITS, the stress of doing something to justify the IIT choice. And I’m also sure there would also be certain avenues of mental peace such as – I’m an IITian, I don’t need to prove anything to anyone else now, life’s set.

But what I’ve learnt from my father is that the best way to live is to never need to prove anything to anyone. Quite simply, ‘you do you’ – nobody else should matter, because they are not you. Ways in which I feel BITS would facilitate my mental peace – knowing I’ve in a way “escaped this race”, i.e., I’m no longer looking to please the world as much, I’ve already lost that battle by leaving behind IIT. Might work in a confirmation bias kind of way. Also knowing that I can do whatever I want to, without the pressure of having to do it with the intention of getting a job in it/building a CV in it, would be a better way for me to develop and explore my interests. I must admit I don’t work too well when the stakes are high and there is an option to settle with an 8/10, I fear the failure of trying to go for a 10/10.

I know this sounds a lot like me trying to justify my BITS choice to myself – and in a way, that is what it is. I don’t know if it’s because I really dread doing JEE-Adv prep or if I actually feel this way. For a moment, let me try and look at it from a different lens, as to why I should join IIT:

More than anything, it would have to do with helping figure yourself out at the best level possible, with the best people possible. The opportunities will be endless and the name of the institute will bring all sorts of opportunities that aren't even provided by college.

Where BITS ranks in these parameters – All this is there, at a lesser level in BITS. And all the non-core profiles, I'd assume you could do an MBA and have great access to them. Of course, getting into a top MBA college is a very tough thing to do and you'd rather just have those opportunities at an undergrad level.

Right now, I think I'm just going through a tough few days. I don't like doing JEE anymore, but I feel guilty when I'm not doing it because I know it's just another month. I think my mind's very saturated. It's strange because I just came off of a vacation and felt very fresh. Might be the repetition, being at home all the time, or might just be something entirely different. Also, it's not like an ankle sprain where you can see where the injury is/extent of it, and treat it accordingly. I don't even know if I'm actually having a tough time or I'm making it up. All I really want right now is to move onto newer, more exciting things!

Conclusion

Ultimately, there is never going to be a perfect choice. Lucky for me, there is no wrong choice in my case either. Taking a deeper look into myself I must realize that it is for me to pick based on things I want to prioritize. Looking back at this dilemma, it will probably feel small and silly. Right now, it is quite frankly overwhelming. I will talk to my parents, and stay off of YT videos regarding this for the time being.

While this blog was only for me to clear my mind a little bit, it is a public blog. In case you did read through it and are in a similar situation, I hope it made you feel a little

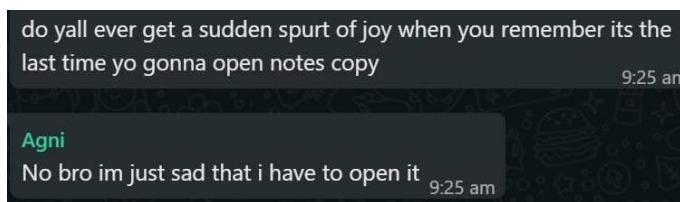
less confused and a little more informed. Otherwise, maybe you just understood me better. Thank you.

”

Ten days after writing the above article, I was in a very similar situation in terms of my JEE-Adv preparation. I had essentially stopped preparing for it, but not formally. I still revised a few days before the exam and went to write it wholeheartedly. I spent that month before Advanced in quite a tough mental state. Often I would try to get back on the horse, but I just couldn't - I had lost the motivation because suddenly BITS seemed like a better option anyways. So essentially, I would hate it if I studied and hate it if I didn't. Regardless it was like a constant mental weight.

My father was quite keen that I restarted preparation two-three weeks before Advanced, so I tried my best to. Even then though, it was an exhausting task. I would study for half an hour and it would feel like eight hours. However, I did give two full length test papers and it felt so normal. It didn't feel like I hadn't opened a single book for a month. JEE coursework was ingrained into my mind, which was actually quite relieving.

Soon, it was the last week before Advanced. Everyone said it was “only 7 days”, but to Agni (friend from Lon) and I, it felt more like 6,04,800 seconds. It was perfectly summed up in this reply:



Anyways, I wasn't really nervous or worried about Advanced. More about that in the next chapter.

Something to highlight in this chapter was this ‘extended’ semester (March-Sep) being a strange one. There was a lot I never thought I would be able to do, and a

lot I thought I would be able to do, but just couldn't. One constant upside was getting to appreciate my last few months at home. I absolutely love it here. For a while, my cousin Dhruv had also come to BLR to visit the college he will be going to - IISc BLR. I had lots of fun with him as well. Meeting up with my chaddi-buddies Ritvik-Sahil (my cousins in BLR) is always a different level of enjoyment. Covid and lockdown enabled us to meet a lot more frequently and I am very grateful for that as well.

Another person that Covid really allowed me more time to talk to is Priyam. Our friendship is very unique. It feels like we're both cut from the same cloth. We talk about everything and have so much fun doing so. I'm physically laughing at jokes, raging at football teams or thinking seriously about our JEE irritations when we text. It's awesome to have real, unfiltered friends.

Chapter 7

Advanced & Reflecting on JEE

The day of JEE Advanced was nothing unique, everything was the same as any of my JEE Mains centres. Like always, twenty minutes before the exam starts, I have a massive adrenaline dump. If I close my eyes I can feel my brain ‘fueled up’ and just thumping. When this happens, I usually just go back to a default state, which in case of JEE is the hard muscle memory I’d built over two years. So once the exam starts, I’m more like an AI robot than a human. I see a question, map it to something similar I have done, quickly go over 2-3 possibilities of approach, pick what seems most efficient and solve. If I don’t know how to approach, I spend no time thinking and directly move on. Essentially, there’s usually very little thinking and mostly just muscle memory.

Right after Advanced got over, it was quite anti-climactic. I thought I’d have this sudden ‘mental freedom’, but it wasn’t so. I was just exhausted. My friend put it well, “We didn’t win an award to get excited about, we finished walking through a desert. It’ll take time to rehydrate.” Thought that was an extremely accurate way to describe our situation. Also I realised that the entire last month, I didn’t do anything either way. So completely chilling out now would not be much different with respect to how my day would look! Anyways, the following week I met up with friends and it was lots of fun.

Simultaneously (three days **before** Advanced), BITS had started their online semester. It was just introductory stuff so not much to talk about. Technically there was no time off between our last exam and college starting, however, everyone did take a few days off, myself included.

From one long journey, right to the next! Nothing to complain about though, going to a top institute during the pandemic is/was an incredible privilege and a few speed bumps are unavoidable.

I'm writing this next section before my Advanced results come out. The reason is that I don't want the results to alter the way I feel about the journey. I will talk about the result afterwards.

Things I did that I feel worked for me

1. Prioritising JEE - It's the bare minimum for any serious candidate in my opinion. Of course, many people manage to excel in multiple things, but in my experience, JEE is a game that requires you to be all in. No concept of balancing things and being an all-rounder. Along with this, you have to be motivated from inside. No one from outside can do it. You have to want to do well, seriously want it. If you don't want it, you won't win the game anyways. It's too stressful and hectic to half-ass it while being semi-motivated. I've been on both sides, having been motivated and not. I've seen the difference it makes - it's crazy. Motivation along with prioritisation makes being disciplined, focused and all the other things very easy. It becomes a subconscious decision and now it doesn't tire you nearly as easily as consciously deciding to study would.

2. Like-minded & Helpful Friend Groups - I think I've already spoken about the impact this had on me enough in the previous chapters so I'll keep it short here. The crux is that having people go through the same thing as you makes it much easier. Going out of your way to help others, asking for help when you need it and being a solid team player are things I really benefited from. My friends served more roles than I can even count. A few: teacher, student, therapist, teammate, advisor, sibling, partner-in-crime, etc.

3. Consistency > Intensity - Incredibly important in my opinion. At the start of 11th, there were around 100 people who were seriously starting preparing for JEE (in all the places I went to combined). Towards the end, only around 10 people remained who had their preparation to the point where in hindsight they couldn't do much more. And it all came down to only one thing - consistency. Intensity varies across days and weeks but just sticking it out from Day 1 till the last day is an incredibly difficult part. People always just look at the 10 who did it and

conclude “Oh ye to ho hi jayega, sab log kuch na kuch karke kar hi dete hai.” Couldn’t be farther from the truth. The ninety people who left aren’t weak minded or stupid by any means. It’s just that they weren’t willing to pay the ‘price of JEE’. Fully understandable in my opinion. If I were to go back to eleventh knowing what this price would be, I’m not sure I would even do it again. Regardless, the main point is that consistency is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome and managing to stay in the race for long enough is underplayed. Understanding its importance and ‘paying this price’ of repetition and monotony is something that really worked for me.

Side note: Condensing the entire chapter into a few pages was really useful for me. It allowed me to revise the entire syllabus in a short duration and also helped break down every chapter into a few core concepts. I will link a Drive where I have uploaded all my notes in the hopes that it helps someone, at some point in some way. Copy-paste the URL into your browser if required. Also, I’ve added a lot of additional resources that we managed to get from the internet.

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=1E0kWsjn0oSe2YYbl3bi1MqL7C9ZLChpf>

Things I did that I feel did not work for me

1. Lack of Self-Belief & Willingness to Settle - This one is the opposite of the popular ‘too high expectations, too much pressure on yourself, only IIT’. Throughout the two years, I didn’t really believe that I could be amongst the best in the country. I think I was always scared of setting the bar too high and failing to meet the expectations I’d set for myself. As a result, I was more than happy to settle with something lesser. I’d probably cook up some story to convince myself why the ‘lesser’ thing is also good enough. While this didn’t affect my work ethic, it definitely affected the more subtle things which ultimately compound. This subtle thing is ‘cutting corners’.

2. Cutting Corners - As a result of me not thinking I would break into a certain rank barrier, often I would just neglect tough questions/concepts. This was more prominent during Advanced preparation. If some question in the paper was too

tough, I would just call it useless and hopelessly out of my league and move on. Apart from that also, I think I would often cut corners during the two years also in terms of skipping class here and there, or taking some topics less seriously. I do think I could've done a better job getting back to those questions/concepts at a later time and solidifying my understanding of them. It would have ultimately made me more prepared.

3. Late to Analysing Mistake Patterns - This one is more subtle. It's also more of a technical mistake I made. Not exactly a mistake, but something I wish I had done earlier. Instead of analysing mistakes as individual errors, noticing consistent patterns in the mistakes you make was a game changer for me. Closer to my first mains I started doing this, and the number of mistakes I was making started reducing. It's simply just dividing your mistakes into very specific categories. As an example, I was very prone to making division/multiplication errors in numerical type questions. No logic behind it, but it was a pattern. For the first one and a half years I would just dismiss it as a silly mistake, and hoped I'd not make it again. But later when I realised this is a recurring mistake, I just slowed down when I had to divide/multiply in a numerical type question and solved it more carefully. Just like that I eradicated a frequent error. If I had done this from the start, I think I could have optimised my paper solving skills to a greater degree.

I want to further elaborate on a line I had written earlier - “If I were to go back to eleventh knowing what this price would be, I’m not sure I would even do it again.” At the end of the road, I’m very happy for all that I’ve got from JEE (good college, not afraid to work as hard as required, consistency etc). However, if you told me that I could go back in time and re-do the JEE days and not make the mistakes I made, I would not go back and change anything.

JEE was a one time thing. It is not something I want to go back to. For two years I put my heart and soul into it and gave it everything I had. To achieve more, I would have to ‘pay the price’ of entirely reducing social interactions and taking my studies a lot more seriously. Something I don’t think I could do, and even if I could - something I don’t want to do.

I think the real reason I wrote this book was to clear all the cache-memory accumulated in my mind over the last year or two. It's been very taxing for me and has left me with a lot to sort through even after it's done. This is just my way of doing that! Also I enjoyed writing this a lot.

From here, I have written the rest of the book after my results came:

So a few days after JEE-Adv got over, the response sheet came out and with it, Mellon's Answer Key. Even thinking about the moments right before I checked my answers makes me super nervous. But anyways, I checked the paper and I calculated a total of 186/360, which is 52% of the marks. I was incredibly happy at that moment. I would have never thought that I would do that well, and after the months leading up to Advanced, it was even more of a surprise!

After checking my marks I had expected an AIR between 1500-2000 so now I had to re-make the college choice. Here's where the plot twist happened in terms of BITS vs IIT.

Picking A College 2.0:

“

Not too long ago, I'd written a rather emotional blogpost about why I was going to take CS @ BITS over any core branch @ IIT-B. Today I received my Admission Letter from IIT Bombay. Through this blogpost I'll try to explain what led to this 'silly, conventional' (as I called it a few months ago) decision!

Before I start with the actual reasons, I must admit that I'm not as logical a decision maker as I thought I was. Rather, I'm strategic enough to find logical reasons to support the decision I've already made in my mind! A few months ago, when I didn't want to study for JEE-Advanced anymore and was having a bit of a rough time, I structured things in a way that it 'logically' led to BITS being the better choice. This all changed when I got my JEE-Advanced result. Firstly, my

judgement wasn't influenced by frustration and exhaustion anymore. Secondly, it was good enough to get me a seat at any top IIT (not CS though).

Suddenly, the infamous 'College v/s Branch' decision had to be re-made. So, once again, I started spending a lot of time trying to figure out what would be a better fit for me. It was here that the Confirmation Bias hit me like a truck. I used the exact same parameters (which were quite comprehensive) and arguments as I did the first time, but this time I interpreted things in a new light and the final conclusion was the complete opposite.

The major changes in perspective were with respect to the following parameters:

1. Interests and Exposure: I know I initially said that I was really fond of technology, but after giving it more thought, I realised what I meant was that out of the 6 subjects I'd studied, I enjoyed CS the most. My father very wisely pointed out that over the last 4-5 years I've pursued several hobbies and random projects/activities in any field that would interest me. However, not even once did I do anything related to computers or technology. This seemed like the most genuine and unbiased indicator of my true interest in the subject. I was clearly being influenced by other factors. The reality of the matter was that:

A) I didn't actually know much about CS. I didn't know what it actually is about, what the work is like, what the professional life is like, what are the pros/cons of this discipline etc.

B) There are infinitely more careers than the six subjects taught at school. Several seniors told me about fields such as Finance, Consulting, Analytics, Product Management etc. that I hadn't even considered. I could enjoy these things a lot, who knows? They certainly seem just as exciting and cool on the outside as Software does.

This led me to changing my priority from CS specifically to wanting to explore different options and have great opportunities and exposure across the board. It's

quite a well known fact that the top IITs offer many more opportunities to explore non-engineering paths.

2. Alumni Network and Peer Group: As I spoke to more people (from BITS and IIT), it became clear that the people you will be surrounded by and the people you will be able to reach out to in a top IIT is second to none. Throughout my life, most things I've learnt are either from the internet or from the people around me. I can confidently credit 75%+ of my JEE success to my ultra-smart classmates who taught me so much, WAY more than any book or teacher did. Also, over the last few years, having been in both scenarios, I've developed a liking for being below average in a group of incredible achievers more than being at the top of a different group. While I hadn't really prioritized this too heavily earlier, on further thought, it became one of my top priorities.

3. Emotion > Logic: I never really thought I'd go to an IIT, so I never really wanted it. But now that it suddenly became a reality, it's what I wanted! And not just any IIT, I only wanted to go to IIT-Bombay! If I was anyways compromising on course and betting on a better college, why not take the best college possible. Everything about the place became amazing, I was finding the bright side to every possible argument. More than anything though, there's so much magic and mystique about the place that it became an experience I didn't want to give up. To the point to which it felt like not taking it would be something I'd always think about. Don't worry though, I found some logic that worked for me. "You're only 18 and your bad decision is to go to IIT-B, you'll get over it."

This was why I decided to go to IIT Bombay, and not BITS Goa.

”

So the following week I did intensive research about the branches I could get at IIT-B (I hadn't got my rank yet but wanted to do research because I had nothing better to do and it couldn't hurt to do). The research included talking to seniors from those branches and reading stuff online. I didn't actually know any seniors initially so I did three things to get closer to connecting with some. First, I

messaged some BITS or school seniors to connect me to some of their friends in any IIT. Then I asked the ‘any IIT friend’ to connect me to a 3rd/4th year friend from IITB. Finally I asked the IITB friend to connect me to someone from a particular branch in his batch. It worked quite well, of course a few difficulties here and there, but most seniors were extremely helpful so it was rather seamless. The entirety of Lon was doing college research as well so it was another thing we did together, and it was very fun. Also, in that week, four of us from Lon finally met up after a year. Oh what a day it was - chilling out, chatting away, mystery rooms, meeting Enol, Udupi Park dosa overdose, Milano ice-creams, it was just amazing!

Onto the day of the results. It was 15th October and I was in Goa with my cousin Dhruv. Results were supposed to come at 10AM but I had woken up at 6.30AM because I was very nervous. We both talked and he did a good job of keeping my mind occupied. Finally, it was 10AM and I went to check the results. Surprise surprise, the servers were down. So the next fifteen minutes felt like an hour, but eventually the site came back up and I entered my credentials. Only thing left was to press the “Check Result” button and I was so nervous; my heart was beating like crazy. I clicked the button and saw “AIR 1695”. So many emotions that hit all at once. The two main ones as far as I can remember were “YESSS” and “Wow, I can’t believe it.” It was a very happy moment. All those close to me were overjoyed when they heard the news. I personally felt relief, more than anything else. Almost three years in this and it’s finally come to an end. I don’t know how to exactly describe it but it felt like a balloon inside my head was filled with so much that it was on the verge of exploding but suddenly it’d been allowed to deflate.

Over the next few days, I continued doing more research and talking to more people. I had finally narrowed my choices down to two options at IIT-B: B.Tech in Chemical Engineering or B.S. in Economics. More on that in the next (and last) chapter.

A quick anecdote - as my other friends weighed out different branches in different colleges and what suits them best, I had decided from Day-1 that I only wanted to

go to Bombay. Not based on logic, just based on vibe. As a result, I was so excited every day. Everytime I would think about it, I'd feel this surge of "woah no way!!" through my body. A good friend, Priyam also practically finalised going to IIT-B and mindlessly talking about how crazy it is became a daily routine.

Chapter 8

Finalising A College & The Future

The next dilemma was which branch to take. At my rank there were primarily two options - B.Tech. in Chemical Engineering or B.S. in Economics. I spoke to several seniors from each of the departments which really helped. Getting information first hand was incredibly useful for me.

Chemical Engineering - A well established branch with people doing amazing things in all sorts of things. However, the coursework is extremely hectic, professors are strict and it leaves you with a lot less time than other courses. I went through the curriculum and it was something I didn't particularly like. I would've done it if it was the only option, but the part about it being one of the most rigorous courses in the institute and eating away a lot of your time really put me off. My entire reasoning for joining this college was to explore, interact and develop. Spending 50% of your time on a branch you know you aren't going to pursue further seemed like a bit of a waste to me.

Economics - Quite a new branch, with a bit of buzz around it amongst students and industry professionals alike. Instead of explaining it myself, I would strongly suggest reading a comprehensive blogpost that an IIT-B Economics alumnus has written: [Economics at IIT Bombay](#).

We will be going over the following things in this blog:

1. Why Economics at IIT Bombay?
2. What will you be studying ? — Curriculum
3. Things you need to know — Pros, Cons, and otherwise
4. Comparing Econ across other IITs (IIT K, IIT KGP)
5. Internships, Placements and Higher Education — Statistics and other information

The different topics he covers

After speaking to several other seniors, reading lots of articles and watching some official videos about this on YouTube, mostly everything was consistent with what was written in the blog. Just for the sake of leaving no stone unturned, I have further added the main points I personally gathered. Also these were some of the main apprehensions my family and I had before selecting this branch. Slight note: most comparisons here ("doesn't matter", "prefer", etc) is with respect to Chemical Engineering.

Higher Education:

1. MS in a stream that isn't your UG degree - Possible from any branch, but will require you to build a solid profile in that discipline (minors, projects etc.)
2. MBA [abroad] - branch doesn't matter, what you do in college matters
3. MBA [India] - IIMs prefer Eco students: they come under the non-engineer category.
4. MS in Economics - New branch so slightly unestablished when it comes to tier-1 admits. As of now there isn't a standard path laid out on how to do an MS in Eco from MIT or LSE and this might be the biggest con. However, by the time I'm in my 4th year, six batches should have passed out so hopefully the situation will be alright.

Jobs after UG:

1. Software/IT - All that open for all branches, open for Eco.
2. Non-core, i.e., Finance/Consulting/Analytics/Product - Open for all branches. Eco might have a slight edge considering they spend 3 years in topics slightly more relevant to such fields than other engineering courses.
3. Core engineering roles [FMCG, Research] - Only for a particular branch.
4. Entrepreneurship - Branch doesn't matter. Quite a lot of people get into it, more than you'd imagine.
5. Some recruiters don't know about the course yet but its credibility is building up relatively quickly (being a course offered by IIT-B helps.)

Time at college:

1. Course: I found the curriculum quite interesting (more than Chemical for sure) and some of the courses are apparently quite modern and useful. It's relatively chilled out in terms of the workload which leaves you with the time to explore other times. Also, it's easier to maintain a good grade as compared to Chemical.
2. Professors: Decent - nothing great, nothing bad.
3. Opportunities/Clubs: Same as any other branch: same hostel, same activities, same everything.
4. In fact, after the first year the priority of branch change in the last few years have been CS, Electrical, **Econ**, Mechanical,... so it's quite an up and coming branch. 3 years ago, Chemical closed 200 ranks ahead of Eco in the counselling but this year Eco closed 200 ranks ahead of Chemical. The point I'm trying to convey is that it's not an "absurd, unpopular" choice - it's popularity is definitely on an upward trajectory.

These were the reasons I picked Economics @ IIT-Bombay. I'm very excited for the next four years!

Once the counselling process finished, I got my admission letter:

Document Verification-cum-Seat Acceptance Letter																										
Verifying Centre : Indian Institute of Technology Bombay					Round Number : 1 Home (ResultHome.aspx)																					
Document Verification Date : 27/10/2021 18:09:00 PM																										
Candidate Details																										
JEE(Main) Application Number : [REDACTED]			Date of Birth : [REDACTED]																							
Candidate Name : HIMANK GUPTA			Father Name : NIMISH GUPTA																							
Mother Name : PRIYANKA GUPTA			Category : General																							
Person with Disability (PwD) : NO			State of Eligibility : KARNATAKA																							
JEE(Advanced) Details																										
JEE(Advanced) Roll Number : [REDACTED]			JEE(Advanced) Registration No. : [REDACTED]																							
AAT Status : NO																										
Rank List(s)																										
Rank List		JEE(Main) (B.E./B.Tech.)		JEE(Main) (B.Arch.)		JEE(Main) (B.Planning)		JEE(Advanced)																		
CRL Rank		1308		--		--		1695																		
Seat Allotment Details																										
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Institute Name</th> <th>Academic program</th> <th>Allotted category</th> <th>Seat Pool</th> <th>Allotted Quota</th> <th>Choice No.</th> <th>Round No.</th> <th>Allotted based on</th> <th>CRL Rank</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Indian Institute of Technology Bombay</td> <td>Economics (4 Years, Bachelor of Science)</td> <td>Open</td> <td>GENDER-NEUTRAL</td> <td>All India</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>JEE (Advanced) 2021</td> <td>1695</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>									Institute Name	Academic program	Allotted category	Seat Pool	Allotted Quota	Choice No.	Round No.	Allotted based on	CRL Rank	Indian Institute of Technology Bombay	Economics (4 Years, Bachelor of Science)	Open	GENDER-NEUTRAL	All India	1	1	JEE (Advanced) 2021	1695
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And that was that. My **JEE Journey** was officially over. One phase of my life ended, and after a month or two of vacation, a new one would start. One that I cannot overstate how excited I am to get into. JEE was one hell of a ride!

So that was my journey! I'll end by trying to answer quite an important question, "So what's next?"

Objectively correct answer: I don't know, we'll have to see.

A more personal answer: I don't know, we'll have to see. While I am very happy about joining this great institution, I'm even more excited to meet new people, explore different things and really just expand my boundaries. I'm not sure what I want to do either as of now, but I think if I just keep at it with a positive attitude for the next four years, I will get a better sense of what works for me and what doesn't. I know how fortunate I've been to have fared well in this journey and I fully intend on doing justice to this privilege I've been given. That being said, I can't wait to absolutely enjoy my college life and make the best of it!

Miscellaneous Memes & Collectibles

In this chapter, I will compile a set of golden start mark memes, write-ups and screenshots. It's not meant to make sense, it's cheap humour, but I love it.

The DOC: An Ode To The King

Leader laws (Ho gaya)

1. show up 40 mins late and ask followers to hurry up
2. when in doubt, use proof by observation and redirect follower's frustration onto something generic like bad internet
3. If leader laws #1 and #2 don't work, just leave
4. Re-ask the question to the follower multiple times
5. Answer by re-stating the basics + few fancy terms

Quotes of our supreme leader

1. This is a nonsense kind of a talk
2. Arey nalaayak by
3. Is pe hum ek question mark laga de te hai and research karte hai. I will quote examples in front of you
4. There is a lot of expectation workload on you - don't behave like a normal child
5. WE DONT HAVE ANY OTHER CHOICE AS AGNI IS NOT READY TO ADJUST FOR A SINGLE DAY IF HE CAN LEAVE SCHOOL CLASS FOR ANY ONE DAY WE CAN ADJUST SUNDAY CLASS THEN
6. Lets change polarity of pairwise complementary functions
7. Hyperbola, parabola, *kaun nahi bola?* ELLIPSE

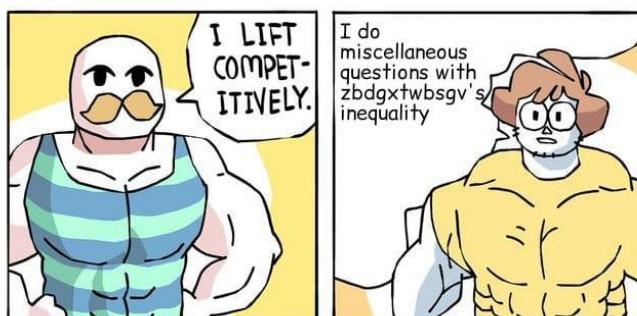
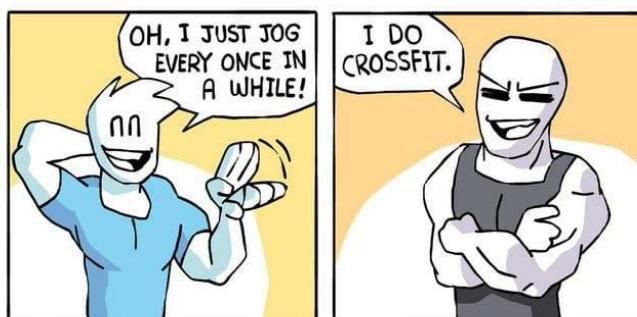
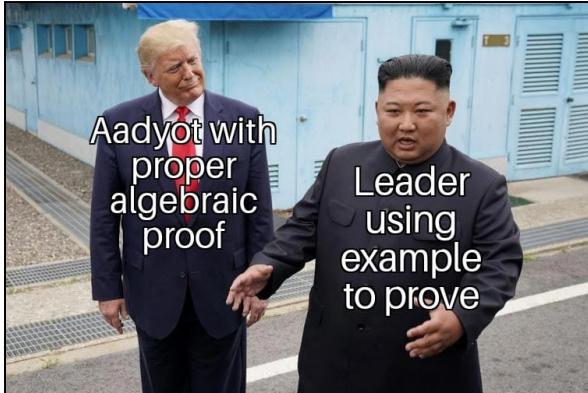
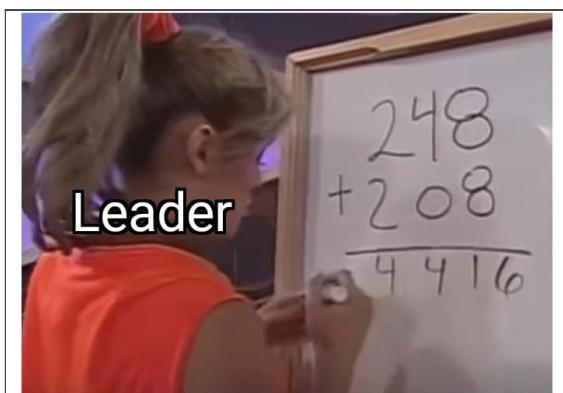
Gallery of our supreme leader



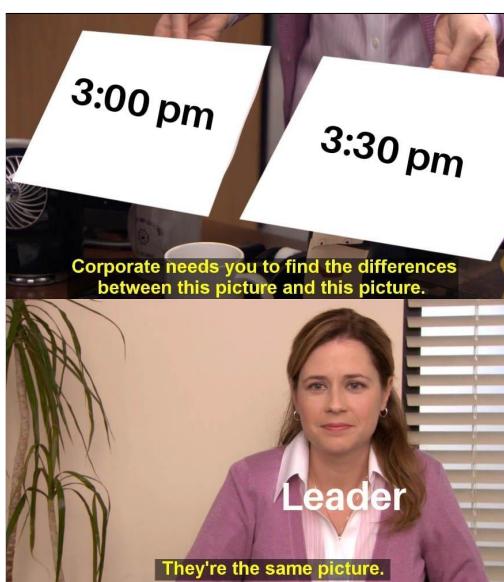
Supreme leader converting water of refractive index1 to ethanol of refractive index <1 dated 1 BC



Supreme leader collecting 6 shot trix and proving them by example



SHEN COMIX



There are an infinite number of Maths Group chats that we (Lon) have on NPL, but I'm not sure about the feasibility of pasting everything in this book.

Lon: Genuinely Miscellaneous

I want to list out the Lon resources that have been created by now and their purpose. Each of them have many stories and memes associated with them!

WhatsApp Groups

1. ∫Lon - The primary group. The OG.
2. LoN Portions, Timetables!! - To store the different test schedules & their syllabus.
3. Warriors - To talk about important things that we don't want to get lost in Lon spam.
4. Naalayak Pvt Ltd (NPL) - To store the glorious highlights of all our top meme moments.
5. OK KVPPY - To talk about KVPPY exam related stuff.
6. BITS InfoNation - To talk about BITS exam related stuff.
7. IIT InfoNation - To store conversations with IIT seniors and imp josAA info.
8. Bright n Shine -To store all key NCERT points and to quiz each other on small theory lines that we might have missed during Mains preparation.
9. Individual Maths, Physics and Chemistry Doubts Groups - To ask and clear each other's doubts.
10. Individual Mellon PCM Groups with the respective teachers - To coordinate classes with the teachers.
11. Individual Birthday groups for each Lon member - To coordinate making a video for the birthday boy without him knowing.

I have skipped certain redundant ones like 'brite and shite highlights' but all-in-all there are easily 20+ groups.

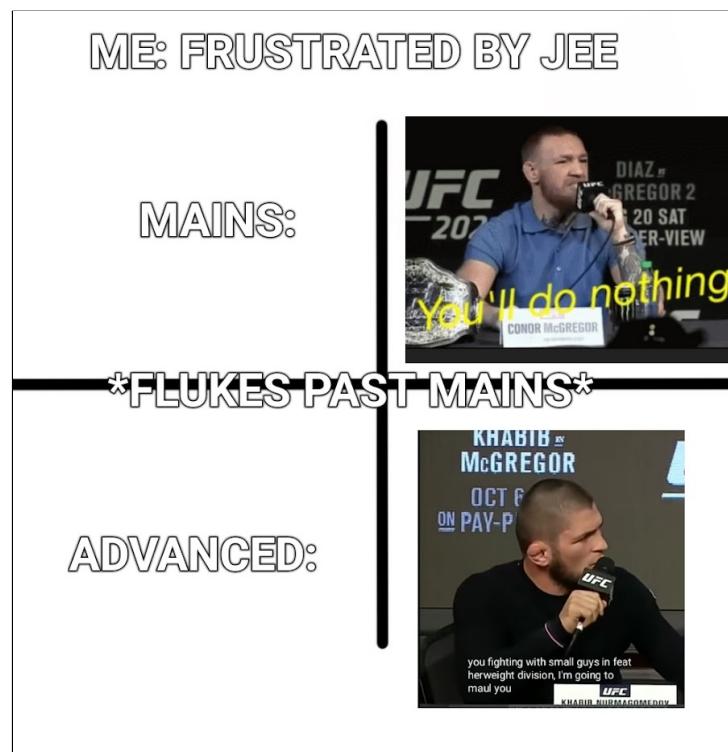
Other platforms

1. Lon Discord - For discussions, calls and other miscellaneous things.
2. Lon Drive - To store all documents, worksheets, papers etc.
3. Shottrik Warrior [Lon YT page] - To make funny videos and store them there.

Miscellaneous Study Related Groups:

1. Japendar - A group with Kapu and I for us to coordinate/store important details during our JEE Adv papers that would have got lost in our other private/group chats.

2. MIITJAA AITS Discussion - Where five of us [Me, Kapu, Ayush, Sinha and Nishim] discuss our common MIITJAA papers.
3. BITSAT MT Discussion - Where the same five discussed the Mathongo BITSAT test series we had got.
4. Liam & Himank Star Marked - Some notable memes:



Epilogue

I hope you enjoyed reading about my journey! A few of my friends who've read this suggested that I promote and share this with juniors as it could be very helpful. I'm not too fond of promoting my own work so if you do read it and feel like sharing it - go for it, the book is free.

Let me know if you/anyone have inputs, suggestions or comments. I'd love to hear them, DM me on Instagram - @himank.gupta_