

School is a place familiar to all of us. It's supposed to be where children play, cry, and learn.

But school is supposed to shape us — sometimes it breaks us first... or breaks some of us completely.

When I joined St. John's English Medium School, I wasn't scared like most kids. In fact, I was curious. I was one of the so-called toppers until Class 4. Almost every teacher liked me. I didn't have many friends, but the ones I had were good ones.

But after Class 4, everything started to go downhill. I became the kind of student people called a "topper" only by name — not by action.

Then came Corona. Lockdown hit India on 30th January 2020. Like many students, I didn't study at all during that time. I spent my days playing video games. Online classes felt interesting for a while — then they just became background noise.

When lockdown ended and schools reopened, I returned nervous, unsure of why. I felt left behind academically but still tried to act high and mighty.

Class 7 and 8 were... diabolical. But they shaped me. I had fallen behind.

In Class 7, I finally saw just how far I had sunk. I was desperate to come up. In Class 8, I studied slightly harder. It wasn't enough. But I began to earn back my teachers' respect.

Then came Class 9 — everything changed. I became friends with a transfer student. At first, I didn't know he was smart. But after the first term, I came 3rd in class, and he came 2nd — a full 8% ahead of me.

That moment lit a fire in me. I studied harder, and by the final term, I had beaten him.

And then... Class 10 — the year everyone calls the most important.

I was ready. I began studying the moment the session started. I stopped talking to friends. I even skipped school just to study alone at home.

My social life? Gone. I barely talked to my parents. I became someone who preferred silence, solitude — and perhaps even suffering.

But it worked. I smashed my first test and ranked above all.

Then... something changed. The fire that drove me — it burned out.

It wasn't that I had stopped studying, I just wasn't studying like before.

When the board exams arrived, I wasn't scared. In truth, I didn't care anymore.

It felt like the fire inside me had already been satisfied — but I didn't know by what.

I wrote the exams casually and still scored 87% overall.

My friends did better. My parents criticized me. But none of it affected me.

And for the first time — I didn't care what anyone else had achieved.

It didn't concern me.

Because I had realized something:

I don't need to be like others.

Their goals are not my goals. Their ranks are not my ranks.

I am me.

And that's when my real journey began —

the journey to become perfect... in my own way.