



Blog 1: How I Reached IIT Bombay

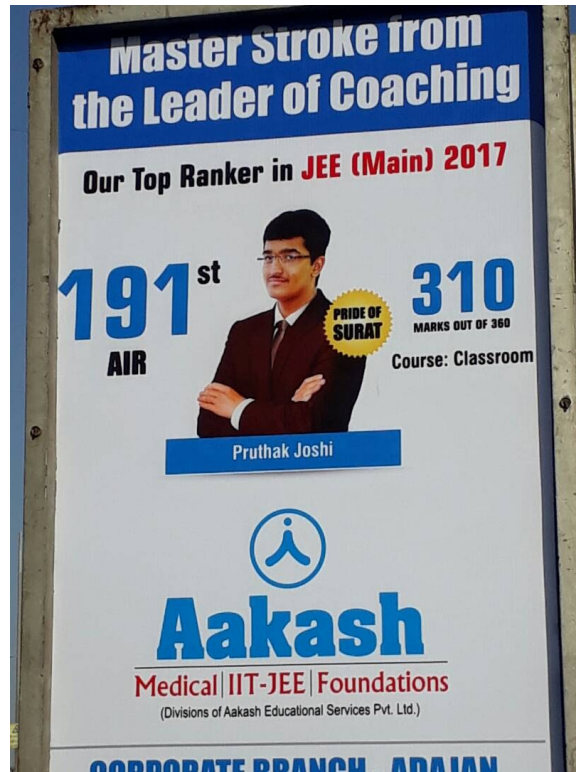
They say life has a way of guiding you to the place you need to be. I NEEDED to be at IIT Bombay (story for some another day). Not that I even knew how huge IITs are, or even what level of preparation one needs to just get into them. You see, in my opinion, national-level competitive exams are largely a playing game of the more-aware and the more-fortunate. For e.g. where I come from, you study for the school examinations, and on the basis of the score you get in the Board examinations, you take admission in a college which is located near your home, and live your life merrily. However, preparing for IITs is a whole different ball game. You see, Board examinations take a complete backseat there, and you prepare for the “tougher” examinations, namely the JEE Main and JEE Advanced. The (logical) idea behind this is that - if you prepare for the war (JEE), the battles (Board examinations) become easier. Also there is this fact that hardly 1% of the total students appearing for the JEE are selected in the IITs, and to be among them, you have to be at your best.

10th standard examinations are an important milestone in Indian students' life. You have to decide what track you want to pursue to build a career. I used to (still do!) studying Mathematics and Physics, thanks to my parents pushing me to be curious and trying to understand why things were the way they were. As a result, it was fairly straightforward to take up science as a career option. However, looking at my parents' jobs (they are

doctors) and my general habit of running away on seeing blood, being an engineer seemed the perfect choice for me.

During the 10th standard, I was enrolled in a coaching class of one of the most famous teachers (hereafter referred to as J) in my city at that time. He was a typical flamboyant teacher who everybody loved, and also taught well. I have made some of the best memories and friends through that coaching classes. When I went to him for guidance on how to navigate through the next few years of my academic life - which coaching centre to enroll for my high school (11th and 12th grades, how to prepare for competitive exams like JEE, etc.), he was of the firm opinion that I should enroll in some local coaching centre for preparation of my 11th and 12th grade Board examinations (the aforementioned "battles"). J believed that in preparing for the "war", students lose track of the "battles" and end up losing everything. He was of the opinion that the competitive exams are not for me, and by shooting for the stars, I might end up losing sight of the ground.

At the same time, **Aakash** - one of the largest national-level coaching centres opened up in my city. They boast of training a large number of students cracking the coveted JEE Main and JEE Advanced over the years and securing a place in the IITs. As a part of their initial marketing drive, they invited the top 3 academically ranked students to appear for their entrance test - ANTHE (Aakash National Talent Hunt Examination). ANTHE is a scholarship-cum-admission test of Aakash. Based on the performance of students in this examination, they provide scholarships to students to study at their coaching centre and prepare for the JEE. I was invited to appear for ANTHE since I was the topper of my school. I appeared for the exam half-heartedly, and was able to secure a decent enough rank. Aakash offered me 75% scholarship on their entire 2-year programme where they train you for the JEE. Mind you, at that time (in 2017), the total fees was about INR 2,00,000 (US\$3000), which is a pretty big sum. If I were to enroll in this program, I would have to effectively only pay about INR 60,000 (US\$800). This was a huge opportunity for me, but it also brought with it a huge dilemma.



Once I got this scholarship, we again went to J for guidance and to evaluate our options. He again affirmed that I should only prepare for the Board examinations, and was very negative about the consideration of joining Aakash. He repeatedly demotivated me, saying that the teachers won't give proper attention, and I will end up nowhere if I don't prepare for Boards specifically. At the time, my father told me "નિશાનચૂક માફ, નહિ માફ નીચું નિશાન". It is a Gujarati proverb that means - it's okay to fail after aiming high, it's not forgivable if you aim low". He explained to me that if I put in proper efforts into the studies, and I believed in myself while doing so, I will be able to win both the battle, and the war. And so, going against the tide, not paying heed to what "everyone" was saying, going in a different direction than almost all of my friends, I enrolled in Aakash. And the rest, is history....

