

Disclaimer: This AIWSTAC is more about the journey of my life than my CAT journey. It is a long read (5000 WORDS!) but I hope that I am able to motivate at least one person who's able to relate to my journey. Really bad at writing, so please ignore any grammatical errors or the lack of a good vocabulary. I am just very grateful for everything in my life and was too emotional while writing this. Enjoy!

“Ladke mei dimaag hai lekin mehnat nahi karta”

If there's one line that can summarise my entire life, this is the one. My CAT journey has not been about as much of a struggle against the exam itself but rather a struggle against myself. The journey has been over 6 years long and in the last one year I have come to realize so much about myself.

Since the very beginning, I had always been the centre of attention of everyone around me. Someone or the other was always either playing with me, or feeding me or just taking extra care of me. I was pampered, a lot. Growing up in such an environment made me accustomed to all the extra care and attention that I received from everyone around me. However, when my father was transferred to another city, things changed. His job was suddenly a lot more demanding. Moving to a much bigger city meant that my mother had a lot of activities she could pursue and her social circle just kept on getting bigger and bigger, which kept her engaged most of the time. I was very young, like 6 or 7, at that point of time. My sister who was going through her pre-teens was cranky most of the time and would hit me like a lot of elder siblings do if I annoyed her even a little bit, and I started drifting away from her.

Things were changing a lot faster than I would've liked and I started keeping on my own most of the time. I was a decent performer in school, staying in the top 5 of my class until 5th standard. My mother started a business and my sister was busy preparing for JEE. My father is in a government job and the corrupt officials started harassing my father, he was stressed most of the time. Between all this and everyone having more important things to deal with, I became more and more reserved. I barely had any friends. I would eat a lot of food and play pc games all day to cope with what was going on and my academics took a hit because of it. I went from a 90%+ to 60% in a matter of months. A lot of stuff had happened to me as well during the last few years, which I don't wish to talk about here, and I really needed someone to talk to but I felt all alone. Everyone around would blame me for not studying without ever trying to understand me. A teacher compared me to Ishaan Awasthi from Taare Zameen Par and my mother was embarrassed, she cried a lot that day and I could do nothing but feel helpless. All the food that I

was eating to cope up and my steroid-based asthma medication made me gain a ton of weight. I was mocked by my friends, and was bullied by the so-called 'cool' kids. My confidence and self-esteem took a hit and I just felt so alone. I would cry myself to sleep on a lot of nights. During this time, I made a great friend; let's call him SG#1. He introduced me to a lot of cool things like F1, Football, TV Series, Movies, all kinds of music and what not. He was that one friend that was genuinely concerned about me and he tried his best to cheer me up. What a gem of a person he was, always stood up for me against the other kids, teachers and even my parents. A lot of the things I like right now were introduced to me by him. I was never fond of reading and whatever fluency I've managed to attain over the English language is because of things that he got me hooked on to. My sister changed in her last year at home and I started sharing things with her. This would not last long as she moved to Delhi in 2011, and my friend SG#1 left a year later, after the 8th standard. Things felt like they were back to square one and this time, they felt worse.

I again scored in the 60s and got through the 9th standard. My grandparents were visiting at that time and my daadi was telling me about my father's exploits during his time in engineering, how he would teach juniors before exams helping them pass instead of focus on his own exams and yet end up topping. Then she went on to say that nobody in our family would ever come close to achieving what he did. I joked it off at that time but could not stop thinking about it at night. Next morning I got up and told her that I will change and try to at least match whatever he's done. Now being an ICSE kid, 10th standard boards are kind of a big thing. I worked my ass off over the next year. Taught myself basic Java programming (part of our syllabus), and realized that I enjoyed reading history and Shakespeare and all the short stories that were a part of our curriculum. I ended up enjoying the curriculum and somehow managed to do well at science. Ended up scoring 92.5% and I felt like I had redeemed myself. The next two years were massive. I started working out, ended up losing a lot of weight and that instilled some confidence in me. I knew that I wanted to study more about business and chose commerce. It was during that time that the movie 2 states had come out and I asked my sister, who had just taken CAT a few months ago and was going to join XLRI, about the college in the movie. She told me everything about IIM-A and how she dreamed of going there when she started preparing for CAT. I spent the next few days reading everything about IIM-A, it's history, the alumni, the campus and absolutely everything I could find about it. I fell in love with the idea of being in that very campus and promised myself that I will do everything in my power to get there. My goal was now SRCC + IIM-A. I made a few friends in the next two years and had a lot of fun.

12th standard was just amazing. It was the first time I was balancing a lot of things; my academics, hanging out with friends, and gym. I loved reading economics and was pretty good at accountancy as well. I was banking on these two papers and English for my board exams. Fate had other plans, I ended up not reading the word 'journalize' on my accountancy paper and

ended up getting a 12-mark question incorrect. My 100/100 turned into a 88/100. I realized this while discussing the paper with a friend a couple of days later and I almost broke down. I lost all hope and half-heartedly appeared for the other papers. I ended up scoring a 95.75% in my best of four and 93.17% on aggregate. I lost all hope of getting Economics (Hons.) in a top DU north campus college and started looking for other options. I filled the form for just one Mumbai University college and missed out on the cut-off by just 0.03%. I was absolutely dejected. Now because I had P.Ed. in my best four, I ended up clearing the cut-off for B.Com (Pass) at Ramjas College. I felt that the college was reputed and B.Com was the course that I was going to get in Mumbai anyway, so maybe it is going to be okay. This turned out to be a bad decision at that time but a good one in hindsight.

2016-17 was hands down the best year of my life. I met SG#2 and TT, two of my best friends and ones who have always had my back. The time we spent in the Paying Guest Accommodation was absolutely crazy and if there's any point in my life I would want to go back to, this is it. TT was pursuing BMS from a not so reputed DU college and one night while sitting on the roof he told me about SSCBS. Now CBS is unlike any other DU college. The competition and the opportunity to learn there is absolutely amazing. We ended staying up the entire night and discussed about the college at length. I knew CBS was good, but never knew it was this good. Somewhere between our conversation, both of us decided to take the entrance exam for BMS again next year. Now I decided to do this for two reasons: 1. I was barely attending classes and had 30% attendance, and 2. I felt the environment at Ramjas was not challenging enough to push me to grow and the peer group wasn't that great either. This was perhaps the best decision of my life. TT and I ended up scoring the exact same marks in the paper but he unfortunately missed out on CBS due to a lower 12th score, while I barely managed to get in. It was good that I got in because I flunked two papers in my second semester at Ramjas. I felt I had redeemed myself and did not feel bad for missing out on SRCC, which I had been doing for the last one year. CBS was everything I expected it to be and more. I realized that I am among people who are way smarter than I was and that I had done nothing up until this point apart from getting a decent score. There were kids who were great at debating, at music, dramatics, had their own start-ups, and every thing you can possibly imagine. It was crazy, there were a few kids who had left the opportunity to join an IIT and instead chose to come here. I felt absolutely worthless initially because I felt stupid in front of all these amazing kids. I realized I have massive stage fright and practiced speaking in front of the mirror every single day. I still remember when I gave a presentation on Euthanasia and I was absolutely shivering throughout the presentation, my voice breaking several times. I felt embarrassed that day and went back home and cried for hours. I promised myself that day that I will put in double the amount of efforts as the next person to compensate for the lack of smarts. As part of one of the societies in my college, I did everything I could- wrote captions, handled finances, did logistics in Chandni Chowk, attended competitions, organized case competitions, learnt graphic designing. Absolutely anything you can think of. My efforts paid off when I was made the head of the core committee in the second year and then the President in the third year. I overcame my fear of

public speaking to a great extent and was now able to address a hall full of at least 150 people. During my time here, I met another great person, DS. This person has given meaning to my life and has made me love things about myself. This person also happens to be my girlfriend. I can't imagine sticking through everything that I have in the last 3 years here without her support.

While everything was going great at college, as soon as I got into the second year, my CAT journey began. I joined TIME's classroom programme but barely got any time to study during the second year owing to my commitments as the head of the society. Before the beginning of my 3rd year, I interned at one of the best advertising firms and while the work was what I wanted to do, it was monotonous and not very challenging. To top it off, I did not get along that well with the other interns so I had a lot of time on hand. This is when the mock season had started and after doing well in the first 3 AIMCATs, I scored 91 in my 4th AIMCAT and my score in both DILR and QA was abysmal. In fact, I was not able to solve even one set correctly in DILR. This is the time when I realized that my dream of IIM-A would remain unfulfilled if I did not pull up my socks. I had already gone through the heartbreak of missing out on SRCC and I did not want the same to happen with IIM-A. I started solving TIME QA material in mid-June during the free time I had at my internship. That month had its own difficulties. I moved into a different apartment with SG#2 and his friend and had to shift all their stuff along with mine as they were back home for their vacations. I did not have a cook during the entire month of June and had to do all chores by myself. Add travelling each day for 2.5 hours to and from my internship to this and I was absolutely burnt out. I was able to finish 2/3rd of the QA material and was relying on mock analysis for DILR. I was doing decently well at VARC at this point so I was not that worried. Went back home for a couple of weeks during July after my internship and that's when I lost the flow of studying. I had to make an internship report, prepare my CV, start case prep without a group and all of that took a lot of time. College opened in the last week of July and with it started the placement saga. From getting CV proofs, to getting the CV checked by the placement cell to finalizing the internship report, I barely had any time left for case prep let alone for CAT. The first company to visit my college is Bain and I was pretty sure of getting a shortlist owing to spikes in my resume. Add to that the fact that I was the only one from the marketing specialization to get shortlisted and in the previous few years, the person who got shortlisted from marketing usually made it through. I felt that I just need to solve my case well and I'll be in. I spent the first two weeks of August focusing just on my case prep. I had forgotten about CAT, missed a couple of mocks as well. My perfect placement plan did not work as the first 10 minutes of round one went towards my interviewer trying to understand my internship, which she was clearly not impressed with, and then the remaining five minutes went towards the guesstimate. I got a much tougher guesstimate than others in my panel and tried my best. After waiting for an hour, the shortlist for round two was being announced. I heard my name at the very last and was overjoyed. I felt that I can make it now. I was chilling, going through my notes when the HR called me. I thought that I was the first one who is going to be interviewed and left the room with a great amount of confidence. Turns out, another guy with the same first name was supposed to be shortlisted for the second round and they called out my name by mistake. I

felt numb for a minute. I shook the HRs hand and left straight for home without speaking to anyone. I was heartbroken, I had worked really hard for this but luck just was not in my favour. The next 15 days were spent sulking and a short trip to TT's hometown. I felt fresh when I got back and attempted a mock and scored 130. I felt good and was just practicing LRDI from the mocks. My QA prep was on a halt till mid-september when I appeared for Deloitte's process. I made it to the final round of 12 people and was the last to be interviewed. I was grilled for my marketing background and the director, who was a CA, kept questioning me on the Finance paper I had in the previous semester. He mocked me and said whatever you're studying is not needed here, go make ads. I was shattered after this. I was rejected on 13th September, 2019. The very next day I had to decide, whether I want to keep sitting for the not-so-good companies that would visit the campus this semester or focus my attention entirely towards CAT. I decided on the latter and took a mock. For the first time, VARC was my worst section, I had an accuracy of 45% out of 28 attempts. I said to myself that I am going to give it my best in the next two months and learn from my mistakes. My routine was waking up at 7:30, going to college, coming back by 4-5, taking a nap, and studying every single day without fail from 8-2 with a few breaks in between to play FIFA and darts with my roommates. Weekends were spent taking mocks, analysing the previous week's mock and studying for another 8-9 hours. I relied solely on mocks and sectionals for VARC and DILR while I solved TIME's QA material twice in the last two months leading up to CAT. Appeared for another company in October, got rejected in the final round, again. That was a blessing in disguise as the company is now winding up their India operations. Went home for Diwali a week later and spent most of the time studying. Came back on 31st October and did not attend college after that. Everyday was spent studying for 14 hours a day at a stretch. On 16th November, 2019 I got a job offer in a front end consulting role. This eased the pressure on me. I had an interview with McKinsey's back arm a couple of days later and I was rejected again. I did not feel bad for the first time because maybe I had a better role already and because my girlfriend got in. I scored in the 120-150 range in my last 5 AIMCATs. I was relaxed and I knew that I will have another go at CAT.

On the day of CAT, I was supposed to leave for my center at 12:00PM but my cab did not arrive, and every other cab cancelled the ride. I panicked as it was now 12:30 and ran towards the metro station. Caught a rickshaw, changed a couple of metros, took another rickshaw and made it to the center by 1:15. Meanwhile TT, who was in the first slot, told me that VARC was tough. I was a little nervous because VARC had been my Achilles Heel for the last two months. I felt nervous but then I told myself that I have nothing to lose. I attempted the paper very carefully. Solved 5 sets in DILR in 45 minutes with a couple questions not attempted in those 5, I chose the wrong set after that and wasted another 10 minutes. I curse myself for a couple of flukes in this section. QA seemed easy and I was able to attempt 24 questions. The answer key came out on 29th November and I checked it with shivering hands. I started crying and shouting after seeing my final score. I called my mom and cried, then called my dad and cried, and then I

called my sister and this time she cried with me. I never believed I was capable of getting such a good score but I did.

The next month passed on like a breeze, went back home, joined a gym and casually started reading the newspaper. Got back to Delhi on 3rd of January and they released the results on 4th January. Had XAT the very next day and I realized at 11pm that I had got a print out of the CAT admit card instead and instantly ran out without putting on a jacket in *Dilli ki Sardi*. Was looking helplessly for any shop that was open in the Delhi University area and was lucky to find a mobile shop that was open. The owner was kind enough to help me. XAT was decent but I knew that my decision making section was messed up.

Final Scores

CAT '19: (174/176.57/99.66)

VARC (72/70.53/99.56)

DILR (45/49.42/98.58)

QA (58/56.63/98.30)

XAT '20: 97.12X (69%ile in DM)

Calls: IIM A, L, K, S, SPJIMR, MDI, FMS

Missed out on a C call and was the borderline case. Felt really bad about it.

I was really clueless as to how should I prepare for the interview. I was never much of a reader, so reading the newspaper took a lot of my time. Apart from that, January is the advent of the fest season in DU, and as the President, I felt that it was my obligation to contribute and work. This continued till 19th January. I realized that I need to change things and decided to not attend college at all. I had made a decent amount of contribution in building a few cases and a simulation for the fest and came up with solutions to fix the simulation and felt that the rest of the team can take it from here. Spent the next few days reading the various subjects I had in my grad. First interview was SPJIMR on 7th February, 2020. The interview was amazing and I felt I did a great job. I had appeared for only one mock interview as I was saving the rest for my A interview that was scheduled on 16th February. Both of the mocks were horrible and the interviewers told me that candidates like you who are not serious take away the chance from deserving candidates to appear for the interview. I felt really stupid again because I felt that I had blown my only shot at getting into IIM-A. Fast forward a few days, my A interview was pretty nice and I felt that I led the interview well and satisfactorily answered all questions apart from a couple of them where I messed up. Overall, I was still confident. Took a week's break and TT came to stay with me for a couple of weeks to prepare for his IIM-S and MDI interview. I played FIFA, went for long walks in the DU campus at night and basically did everything I wanted to in my final year. Had a lot of fun. Skipped IIM-S interview and both my IIM-K and MDI interviews

were amazing as well. Went back home for my mid semester break after that and that's when all this COVID-19 shit began. My IIM-L interview was postponed. After anxiously waiting for the results, the day finally arrived.

8th May, 2020: I woke up at 12:30pm as I was barely able to get any sleep the night before and was very sleepy. Was still in bed with my eyes closed. Checked the website at 12:53 and the results were not out by then. Closed my eyes again when just 5 minutes later TT called to tell me that the results were out. I got straight up and with shaking hands I opened the result page, entered my credentials and pressed submit. The longest 5 seconds of my life, all I had to do was spot "Congratulations!..." and I can celebrate the achievement of my dreams. The page loaded and the first words I read were not congratulations. I immediately came back to my senses and realized that the first word was not Regret either. I kept on reading only to realize that I had been waitlisted at number 15. I went to my mom and murmured that I was waitlisted, hugged her and shed a tear or two. The waitlist had never moved beyond 12 at IIM-A in the last 6-7 years. I knew that this was as good as a reject. The worst part was the margin I had missed by; I had 79.99% in my UG till the 4th semester. 0.01% more and I would've added close to 1 mark in my composite score. It was not the first time that I had missed out by such a small margin. Remember the Mumbai College? IIM-C call? I cursed myself and questioned why did it have to be me.

A few people from my college were congratulating me as if this was some sort of achievement. I wanted closure because I was sure that I wanted to settle for only ABC. I started looking up at the numbers, the criteria for waitlists and went crazy over it. Even circulated a form in all the IIM-A groups. I was really irritated all the time and shouted at everyone around me. I was distressed and everyone showing their pity made me even more irritated. TT and DS were trying to support me but I shouted at them too. DS was really hurt and almost broke up with me because of other things that had piled on, glad that it did not come to that and we resolved our issues. I talked to @Arsene96 the day after the results and explained him my situation. I had not had my L interview till then and he understood what I wanted and agreed that it is worth giving CAT '20 another shot and helped me make a plan. That's when I expressed my desire to be a part of DT '20.

My analysis through the forms made me realize that I might have a chance of clearing the waitlist if there are more deferrals due to COVID-19, only to realize that there may be a category wise cap and that incoming deferrals aren't accounted for. Slowly all IIMs started releasing their results. IIM-K came out and I was waitlisted, a little surprised because I expected a convert. Had my L interview on 15th which I managed to tank. The days were getting harder to pass and I still had no clarity on the waitlist movement. I got added to the DT '20 group and honestly, was a little intimidated by everyone else and their exploits. IIM-L soon came out with their result, waitlisted again. Then FMS came out, waitlisted again. I finally bagged my first convert with MDI and had made peace with the fact that I was going to take CAT '20 and had already started preparing for that.

It was 31st May, 2020 and I was talking to the guy who was waitlisted at No. 1 at IIM-A (@Oslo) and we were discussing the possible date for the movement of the waitlist. I wished him luck before going to bed as we were expecting some movement on 1st June and told him that he will have to treat me when I meet him next year in Vastrapur. He wished me luck as well and said that maybe I won't have to wait for a year and I could treat him instead. We laughed it off and I went to bed. Woke up the next day at 11:30ish and @Oslo texted me that he has good news. I told him to not mess with me and he said he wasn't. He had called the AO and the waitlist had moved till 15 is what the AO told him. I did not believe him. Numbers started flying on PG as well and someone said 13, someone else said 17. I was really nervous and found it hard to believe. It was 12:56PM when I got the mail with the title "Admissions...". I started shivering as it loaded and then I saw the email-id of the IIM-A admissions office. I could not believe my eyes, I started screaming like a crazy person and my mom woke up from her afternoon nap because of it and started crying. And there it was, the college of my dreams, finally in my reach. I got in after I had given up any hope that I had of making it which is what makes the journey really beautiful for me :')

Calls: IIM A,L,K,S, MDI, SPJIMR, FMS

Converts: IIM A, MDI

Waitlist: IIM-K,L, FMS

Rejects: SPJIMR

For anyone who has read the post till here, thank you. I know this was more about the journey of my life instead of my CAT journey but I really feel that having some direction of what I wanted to achieve in life made me work harder and harder. I know that I have punched above my weight and that is something that I intend to keep on doing. I joined PG in the first week of November '19 and was absolutely in awe of the people here like @Arsene96, @ashwinhari, @IIM_Groot @Bhimana and many others. Their journey has been much tougher than mine and the fact that they stayed resolute in the face of defeat and pursued CAT with such dedication made me believe that anything is possible. If not for such people, I'd have given up and not even thought of taking CAT again. More than anything, what I love the most about the community here is the desire to help people and that is the fondest memory of my time here. I am addicted to PG and use it more than any other social media platform. I have spent my entire life feeling like a loser and for the first time I feel that I have achieved what I set out to, this just makes me believe that all the hard work I have put in over the last 6 years has paid off. Every single decision I made, steered me towards my dream college and I can't thank the people who backed me throughout this journey enough. In retrospect, people like SG#2, TT and DS ensured that I was making the right decision and backed me to believe myself, even when I felt like a loser. They always believed in me. TT, my best bud, who unfortunately could not convert either MDI-G or IIM-S will be joining IIM Raipur and I can't thank my stars enough for bringing him into my life. Without him

motivating me, I would not have dropped out of Ramjas, I would not have met the person I love the most, DS, without him I would not have gone through a massive change that I have undergone in the last 3 years and everything that I have achieved is because he steered me in the right direction and believed in me more than I believed in myself. Just grateful for everything I have.

Would like to sign off by saying that to everyone who has failed this time that anyone who is willing to work harder with each passing day is capable of achieving anything that he/she wants. I am going with a newfound confidence and the motivation to at least try to achieve what I believe I can't, even in the future. I know that at some point of time, the hard work will pay off and I sincerely hope that it pays off for all of you. Special thanks to @Arsene96, @ashwinhari, @IIM_Groot, @Bhimana and everyone else who has made the PG community an absolute delight and for helping everyone with an open heart. To everyone starting their CAT '20 journey, Godspeed.

Signing off,

f_society

IIM-A 2020-22

P.S.: Please ignore my terrible writing skills and feel free to hit me up if you want to discuss anything. Would love to help a few non-engineers as I firmly believe that we need to be a little flexible with our prep, which has slightly different requirements than people from an engineering background.