

From Quiet Determination to a Guiding Light



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Title: From Quiet Determination to Research Light

I was not born into a family of privilege or academic legacy. I was born into a family that believed in something far more powerful — **the transformative power of education for women**. My childhood was shaped by the constant encouragement of my parents and my brother. In our modest lower-middle-class household, they repeatedly reminded me that **education is the strongest foundation a woman can build for herself**. At that age, I did not fully understand the future value of those words. I only knew one thing: **being educated mattered**.

I grew up studying in **Tamil medium**, which was the natural path for children in my community. When I entered higher secondary school, a difficult realization slowly dawned on me — **I was not a brilliant student**. I was what people would call a **mediocre learner**. Marks did not come easily to me. Concepts demanded effort. Learning required discipline. But this realization did not discourage me. Instead, it taught me my first lifelong lesson: **If talent is limited, perseverance must be unlimited**.

The Hospital That Sparked My Dream

My connection with healthcare began long before I understood careers. My father worked as a **pharmacist in a government hospital**. After school, I often walked to the hospital and sat proudly in his small cabin. I remember watching doctors, nurses, patients, and hospital staff moving quickly through the corridors. Some of his colleagues would look at me and say jokingly, *"Why do you come here so often? Hospitals are crowded places. You may get infections!"* I never had an answer for them. I would simply smile.

Because even though I could not explain it, **something inside me felt deeply connected to that environment**. The hospital did not frighten me. It fascinated me. The idea of being part of healthcare quietly settled into my heart. I did not dream of becoming a doctor or a nurse. I simply knew that **one day, I wanted to work in the healthcare sector**.

The Turning Point After School

When my **12th grade results** were announced, they confirmed what I already knew — I was not among the top students. In many families like mine, academic choices are often influenced by **well-meaning advice from relatives and acquaintances**. Following such advice, my father

enrolled me in a **Diploma in Teaching** program. Becoming a teacher was considered a safe and respectable career. Yet, deep inside, the **dream of working in healthcare had not faded**. During my diploma course, I decided to attempt something bold.

I rewrote my **Physics, Chemistry, and Biology** examinations to improve my marks. This decision changed everything. Despite being labeled a mediocre learner, I proved something to myself — **hard work can transform limitations**. I scored **above 90% in all three subjects**. For the first time, I felt a quiet confidence growing within me.

The Courage to Refuse Security

After completing my teaching diploma, I became eligible for a **government primary school teacher position**. In India, a government job is often considered a golden opportunity — stability, respect, and lifelong security. Many people spend years trying to secure such positions. But I did something that shocked everyone.

I declined the government job. People around me could not understand this decision. Some said I was foolish, Some assumed I simply wanted to get married and avoid work, Some believed I had no career clarity. But I knew one thing clearly: **My place was not in a primary school classroom. My place was somewhere inside the healthcare system**. Soon after, I applied for **B.Sc. in Hospital Administration**. The admission committee noticed my improved marks in Physics, Chemistry, and Biology and welcomed me into the program. That moment changed the trajectory of my life.

The Language Barrier

My first day in college was filled with excitement. But the excitement was soon replaced by a harsh reality. Among **28 classmates**, I was one of the very few students from a **Tamil medium background**. Most of the course required strong English communication skills. Some classmates openly told me,

"Hospital administration requires fluent English. This course may be difficult for you."

Their words felt like quiet forms of **academic bullying**. But instead of retreating, I turned those words into motivation. Every morning at **4:00 AM**, I began reading **The Hindu newspaper** to improve my English. Day after day, page after page, I trained myself to understand a language that once intimidated me. That effort soon began to show results. At the end of the **first semester**, the results were announced. To everyone's surprise — including mine — **I secured the University First Rank with distinction**.

That moment was more than an academic achievement. It was proof that **passion combined with discipline can overcome background, language, and doubt**. I continued this journey across all **six semesters**, consistently securing **first rank** and eventually graduating with the **Gold Medal** in Hospital Administration.

Balancing Dreams and Family

Life, however, does not follow a straight academic line. Like many women in India, my journey soon included **marriage and motherhood**. While these milestones brought joy, they also brought new responsibilities. Yet the **fire inside me had not cooled**. While raising my child, I enrolled in an **MBA through distance education**. I still remember attending **semester examinations while carrying my baby along**. At that time, I did not know exactly how these qualifications would shape my career. But I continued learning because **education had become part of my identity**.

An Unexpected Academic Beginning

My professional journey began when I was offered a **Lecturer position in the same Hospital Administration department** where I had studied. Returning to the same classrooms as a teacher was a deeply fulfilling moment. I had finally entered the **healthcare academic ecosystem** I had always dreamed about. However, life again took a different direction due to my husband's **job transfers**. We moved to Chennai, where the booming IT industry opened an unexpected opportunity. I briefly worked as an **SAP-HR Trainer**.

Although it was a valuable experience, my heart was still drawn toward **teaching and research**. So I left the job and began preparing for the **NET examination**, aiming to become a college professor. Ironically, this decision invited criticism — this time **from within my own extended family**. Many people reminded me, *"You should have accepted the government school job earlier."* But by then, I had already learned an important truth: **Conviction must sometimes stand stronger than social approval**.

An Unusual Opportunity

During this period, a friend suggested something unusual — an opportunity to audition as a **Tamil television news reader**. Out of curiosity, I tried. To my surprise, I was selected. Within six months, my visibility as a news reader unexpectedly attracted attention from an educational institution. They offered me a **teaching position in the Catering and Hotel Management department**, believing that my media exposure could bring recognition to the college. I accepted the role and continued teaching for **five years**. But once again, the **call of research** began growing stronger.

The Spark of Research

Determined to advance academically, I cleared the **NET examination** and pursued an **M.Phil. in Management**. My M.Phil. thesis focused on **patient engagement**, and it received strong appreciation from faculty and scholars. It was during this phase that my **statistics professor** played a transformative role in my life. He recognized something in me that I had not fully realized — **a natural inclination for research**.

He encouraged me to present papers at prestigious academic conferences, including those hosted by institutions such as **the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB)**. With every presentation, my confidence grew. I began to understand that research was not merely about data — it was about **answering meaningful questions that impact society**. Before I moved out of Tamil Nadu due to another family transfer, my professor gave me a piece of advice that changed

my future: *"Your research potential is strong. If you want to contribute to healthcare research, pursue a PhD in a specialized institution."* I followed that advice.

The PhD Journey: Seven Oceans and Seven Mountains

My **PhD journey** was one of the most demanding phases of my life. Research required navigating complex stages:

- Identifying the research problem
- Conducting literature review
- Designing validated questionnaires
- Obtaining ethics approvals
- Collecting field data
- Performing statistical analysis

At times, the process felt like **crossing seven oceans and seven mountains**. There were moments of exhaustion when I told my husband, *"I think I should leave this PhD."* But he always responded with calm encouragement: *"If something creates anxiety, leave the anxiety — not the dream."* Those words helped me move forward.

Often, the famous words of **Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** echoed in my mind: *"Dreams are not those which come while we are sleeping, but dreams are those that do not let us sleep."* My dream certainly **did not let me sleep**.

Research in the Middle of a Pandemic

My PhD research focused on **Motivation and Turnover Intention of Community Health Centre Doctors in Rural Tamil Nadu**. Many scholars appreciated the topic for its **social relevance**. However, the most difficult phase came during **data collection** — which coincided with the **first wave of COVID-19**. Government doctors were already overwhelmed and exhausted. Approaching them for surveys and interviews was extremely challenging. Some doctors ignored me, Some scolded me, Some refused outright. At times, I felt deeply discouraged. Yet I continued. Despite being a **43-year-old assistant professor, a mother of two, and the spouse of a senior professional**, I humbled myself to collect the data needed for meaningful research.

Slowly, persistence paid off. The data collection was completed. Statistical analysis followed. With the support of my dedicated research supervisors — one known for conceptual clarity and another for technical precision — my thesis finally reached completion. Soon after, **I was awarded the PhD**. That day, I realized something profound: **Research is not a destination. It is a lifelong journey.**

Lighting the Path for Others

Today, I serve as an **Associate Professor**, teaching **Research Methodology and Biostatistics** in a medical university. My academic role allows me to mentor students, guide research projects, and contribute to healthcare research. Yet the **inner fire has not settled**. I continue learning —

exploring **biostatistics, data visualization, qualitative research methods, and statistical software.**

When I look back at my childhood — the small government hospital cabin, the early morning newspaper reading, the struggles with language and doubt — I feel immense gratitude. I am now working within the **healthcare academic ecosystem** I once only dreamed about. In the process, I have also fulfilled my father's wish of seeing me become a **teacher**. Today, those who once doubted me are older, and life has come full circle. I serve them quietly with patience and compassion.

From Fire to Deep

The fire that once burned silently inside a young girl from a Tamil-medium background **has not gone out**. It has simply transformed. Today, that fire has become a **Deep — illuminating the path for students, researchers, and healthcare professionals seeking knowledge**. And my journey continues — not as a story of success, but as a reminder that **persistence, purpose, and passion can transform even the most ordinary beginnings into meaningful contributions to society**.