

Project phoenix 2

FROM DISTRESS TO SUCCESS: GIRISH KALKAR

Girish Kalkar was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his teens. With the help of his efforts, family as well as social support, and proper medicines, he has recovered.

Working with Bhabha Automatic Research Centre (BARC) for the last 22 years, he has been helping, guiding, and mentoring many people.

This story will prove to be a great inspiration for all of us.



I spent my childhood in Mumbai. We were four members in my family, my parents, my sister, and me. My father was working in BARC, and my mother was a house-

wife. I was an intelligent student in my school. I received a scholarship in fourth and seventh standard too.

My dream was to secure a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

I was quite disappointed when I did not score well in my board examination. But, I went to Nagpur for a diploma in mechanical engineering. I got a distinction in my first year but failed in one subject in the second year. That was very shocking for me, and I think that was the beginning of my illness.

I tried hard to achieve my dream of completing a degree course in mechanical engineering but somehow could not succeed. In the meantime, I found myself in love with a girl. This relationship affected my studies badly. I used to spend a lot of time with her. All my friends climbed the ladder of success, but I felt I was left behind. I developed a fear about my academic exams and that I may not pass them. I used to feel upset most of the time, having no friends around.

I used to sleep most of the time for hours together and used to be angry without any reason. Finally, after a lot of struggle, I could complete my diploma.

I then enrolled my name in the engineering college of Shegaon. I remember that was the time when I used to be nervous and feel sleepy all the time. My mother used to stay with me, ensuring that I studied hard. There was pressure from my family to obtain the degree by now.

I got all the support needed from my family. Nonetheless, as I could not get an engineering degree, I returned to Mumbai in 1988.

I used to be upset and depressed. I was under pressure because my father had

spent all his money on my treatment. It was a very disturbing factor for me.

I avoided meeting people. But, as I was good at drawing and painting, my mother advised me I could make lanterns and sell them. So, I used to go to places to sell those lanterns. An upshot was that I could mix with other people.

I tried taking all types of medicines and various therapies like Flower Therapy and Homeopathy, etc., but nothing helped. The intensity of my illness kept growing. Finally, our family doctor advised us to visit a psychiatrist. After going through all the medical tests, I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

Dr. D'Souza, a professional, helped me a lot in my coping. The main thing was I could talk with him freely. He used to spend a lot of time with me. Many positive changes were observed in my personality because of him. I regularly took medicine and used to discuss everything with him.

Slowly things started improving, and I was back on track. Then, we came across an advertisement by the Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) for a new vacancy. I had been working in a small company during that time, but my mother insisted that I apply for the BARC job.

I once again felt very stressed when I was called for the interview. My illness affected my confidence, but one of our

family friends came to my help. I did a fair amount of preparation and appeared for the interview. In a few months, I received a letter conveying news of my selection.

I got selected out of 10,000 candidates. I was very happy, and it boosted my confidence. My job with BARC started a new chapter in my life. In the meantime, in 2003, I married my college sweetheart. But unfortunately, within 15 days of marriage, my wife filed for divorce. That was a huge shock for me. It greatly affected the emotional state of my mind.

I was intensely disturbed when I saw my parents sitting helplessly in the family court. I must do something now, I thought. That was a turning point for me. During that hard time, my doctor helped me very much. Our social worker in the BARC office also supported me a lot. I used to share my problems freely with both of them, and they spent a lot of time with me. Both helped me a lot emotionally; to come out of the situation and I gradually started the path toward recovery.

My job was going on smoothly. I faced challenges in the job as sometimes people in the office would taunt or tease me. But, I never avoided going to the office. Eventually, I could come out of my deep pain.

Then, my parents started handing over some financial responsibilities to me.

This trust led me to become more responsible. I started taking the financial burden of repaying small loans, further boosting my morale.



In 2006, I was offered a matrimonial proposal of Heena. Heena had completed her MA in Psychology. So, when my family and I gave Heena and her family an exhaustive idea of my illness, they wholeheartedly believed in me and extended their support. As a result, it turned out to be a very happy marriage for both of us. Heena has supported me constantly.

My service has been going nicely for the last twenty-two years. Whenever I feel bored and don't want to attend the office, Heena encourages me. My colleagues who used to taunt me earlier now say "Girish Nahi Hai, to kam nahi hoga" [Girish is not present in the office, so work can't be done.] I feel this is the acknowledgment and validation of my success.

People often ask for my advice on their problems, and I always help them.

My life completely changed when 'Anurag,' our son, was born.

All the fear and doubts I had earlier eventually vanished from my life. I started liking my new role of "fatherhood."

Anurag and I enjoy each other's company. We do a lot of cycling and play with each other. I feel contented when someone refers to me as "Anurag's father".

Today I have been successful because of these factors: support from my family, willingness to learn new coping skills, hard work, proper counseling, and regularity in medicine.



In 2011 Institute of Psychological Health felicitated my family and me with "The Dwij award." This award is given to a person who not only fights with mental illness but also brings the family back on a successful path.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

There is a saying; you should keep trying; you only have a right to action (karma) and not to the fruits of your karma. So do not become a person who is attached to the results.

My next target. Soon, I am contemplating publishing a book of my poetry.

My advice to all friends:

- Keep talking, keep communicating
- We should speak out about the things we disagree
- Keep working without focusing on success
- Never laugh at others
- We should learn from our mistakes and change accordingly
- Never expect immediate relief after taking medicine.
- We have to take our medicines regularly and always trust our doctor
- It is good to maintain a diary regularly. It is useful for you as well as your doctor

Note: Girish Kelkar is working at Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) as "a scientific assistant" for the last 22 years. He was awarded a promotion recently i.e on 28th February.

He has established a self-help group named "Hope" for people with mental disabilities.

He takes a keen interest in many social service projects. For example, he also helps needy students by contributing to their education expenses.

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