

THANK YOU

“Thank you”- A roar of thunderous applause followed this and lit up the hall that was waiting in pin drop silence for the past 7 minutes as I gave my speech, all eyes fixated on my podium and mouths gaping. As I walked down the stage with my teachers patting my back and my juniors approaching me to take notes about public speaking, I felt happiness, the kind I would feel after every speech I gave but it was just mere happiness, I wasn't ecstatic because a good speech never came as surprise to me anymore. I would perhaps just be satisfied with those hours of relentless practice, writing-which also happened to be my favourite and memorizing which payed off on stage. More than enjoying myself on stage, I saw it as me putting a flag of completion on another “task mountain”. I was acclaimed as an eloquent orator in school and everyone seemed to be enjoying me on stage. I was putting my 100% into it, because for me it was more about getting those words heard rather than getting my voice heard. I realized the difference between these two much later and that is when I got the answer to why my degree of happiness did not reach ecstasy.

It was the 23rd of November, 2015 and we were bidding adieu to our retiring Principal. The best speakers in school were asked to give a farewell address and I was one of them! I poured my heart out on the paper a day before and on the D day something happened that my confidence got the best as well worst of me, I decided to not take a single piece of prompt with me. I took the mic, said 3 words, stuttered and stopped abruptly. I stood there frozen as sweat started to drip down my forehead. My brain was screaming- “How did this happen to me?” and then I saw my teacher quietly motioning me to get off the stage. I got off the stage and burst into tears, all my confidence was shattered, my face was flushed red with embarrassment and that stage whom I considered to be my friend appeared like a monster whom I could not even fathom going near to.

Days and months passed by and I had coiled into a shell, refusing any offer to speak that came my way. I would just see the other kids take the centre stage until one day- 21st December 2016 when my favourite English teacher came up to me and asked me to prepare a speaking bit for a Christmas celebration at school. She just told me that she wanted to hear me on stage, I don't know what was in that conversation or her faith that I said yes, after all I had started to miss my old friend- stage, too.

But I decided to do this time a little differently, I wrote my speech but instead of mugging up each sentence, I felt every word and on the day when my name was announced, a chill ran down my spine as I realized that this moment was a privilege that I had started to take for granted. As I began, my hands did shiver but after the 3rd word I was not just repeating what I had learnt, I was living on that stage through my words and then came the “Thank You”- and the applause that followed were louder than I had ever heard before and as I walked down that stage I was finally ecstatic and not just happy.

The summer following that year, I went to every community open mic I could just to relish that stage, appreciate it and speak oh no wait- to get my voice heard.