

## A Journey called CAT

IIM – The acronym every B-Schooler aspires for in India. I being not too different from others had similar aspirations, desires and dreams. Oh yes, forgot to mention the common full form of IIM is Indian Institute of Management; but I came to know of another full form during this journey, which will be eventually revealed to all ☺

Umm...from where to start...let me go back to April of the year 2000. It was the time when my sister made it to the well...Joka land :mg: :mg: It was the time when I was preparing for my engineering and already made my mind to make it to an IIM.

First two and a half years of engineering went fine but it's generally in the third year when one starts thinking about what next! Then I joined Career Launcher in Delhi in my fifth semester and little did I know that I was not the only one aspiring in my batch. I met junta of NSIT there. The classes started and very soon I realized the weakest link for me to the ultimate goal – the VERBAL part. Anyhow, my senior gave me this wonderful advice to taking CAT in the third year to get a “feel” of the exam. I liked the idea and finally took it. And yes, at that time, CAT had no rule which barred people taking the exam who are not in their final years. I think it is coz of people like me that they thought of this rule. It's good to be a reason which made IIMs take a policy decision :mg: :mg:

### **CAT No. 1: Year 2002 in November**

It was a normal 3 section paper in which I had no pressure to perform. The paper went fine and it was the first time wherein the percentiles were to be revealed. Moving to the results, QA was 99.5 % with an 86 odd in DI and some 65 in verbal. This clearly told me where I had to work on – as if I didn't know it before.

Jan 2003 – Oct 2003 – The time when all of my friends, classmates and everyone and anyone was a CAT aspirant. It was good to be in excellent company and I think that competition forced me to prepare for the exam which eventually I think I did.

### **CAT No. 2: Year 2003 in November**

Was I nervous??!! I WAS. This was the day, the time, the 2 hours which are going to decide the future for me. I still remember how the exam went. The sound of opening the sheet, the answer sheet being filled, the sweat, the tension – everything is still like a movie in my mind. Anyhow, in the end I was quite happy with my performance in DI and QA ☺ Also, I knew that I had did well in Verbal because 2 RCs which I attempted in the exam were luckily from some of the test mock papers of the institutes.

But then disaster stuck as soon as I crossed the gates of the school of my center – my mother telling me, “Amit, CAT is cancelled. The paper got LEAKED last night.”

I was like noooooooooooooo, it's difficult to give your best again. Well, with no option left in life, I started preparing for my semester exams.

Forgot to mention this, 3 weeks before CAT, I had a disc collapse in my back which forced me to take bed rest for 2 weeks which meant no studies, nothing but I think that did not have any adverse effects on my CAT preparation.

Ah yeah...had that CAT not cancelled, I would have never joined PaGaLGuY.

Year 2004 has come ☺ I had already done the greatest mistake of my life by filling just 3 forms – CAT, XAT and MDI. The XAT exam was next and so much verbal focus, I knew it was difficult to clear it. But then trying was important, which I did and eventually failed also. But since CAT was still there, I thought to myself that I still have a chance to make it to my dream school.

### **CAT No. 3: Year 2004 in February**

After been there already, I was not as nervous :mg: :mg: but yeah, pressure to perform kills you. The exam was little on the tougher side but it went fine. In this internet age, the solutions were out by the evening but I had decided not to check till the next day.

Next day, I started checking my paper. As always, I started here also with Quant. The performance was sufficient enough to clear the cut-off. I don't know what prompted me to check verbal next. I did and was amazed to see my score and was already jumping in my room...but hang on...story is not over yet.

I checked DI then and my world came crashing down. I attempted 4 caselets and got 2 of them ABSOLUTELY WRONG!!! I scored a single digit in DI; it was something I was not prepared for..why why why!!! After not able to make it in IIT-JEE because of Maths then, again DI did me in.

Crying made me no better and I knew that it was bye bye IIMs and MDI.

The results came out as expected and I was prepared for it. Some of my close friends had all six calls or single calls or some calls atleast. Most of them made it and then we parted on our different paths in life.

I joined HCL Technologies in Delhi in July and was sure of cracking it this time. Some intelligence which I did this time was widening my B-School list – IIMs, XLRI, NITIE, MDI, SPJain, IIFT and FMS. This meant I had to take 4 exams this time and that too with my job. Also, somehow I got a really good project in the company which required me put in a lot of effort there. I could have avoided work but somehow it's in my nature not to give 100% which is entrusted on me. That year, I went to office for 29 days in October, 2 days off being 2<sup>nd</sup> October (Thanks to Gandhiji) and Dusshera (Thanks to God Ramchandra); else I would have been in office then also. Adding to this was a family problem which required me to spend 3 months nights in hospitals as my grandfather was ill. When I look back, I wonder how I managed all this. Oh one more thing, my sister wedding plans was also underway which required my inputs and participation too.

### **CAT No. 4: Year 2004 in November**

The exam time came. CAT, XAT, IIFT and FMS. Results: calls from IIM-L, MDI, IIFT and NITIE. I was confident of converting one call atleast this time. CAT percentile overall was 98.94%. Also, this was the time when PaGaLGuY shot to fame with that result link getting exposed and all ;) This was the first CAT in which differential marking was introduced.

Jan 2005 – MDI interview, my first B-School GD/PI experience. Somehow managed the GD and went in the interview. Interview was okie-dokie. With next 3 interviews in March, I had loads of time to prepare for them.

Feb 28, 2004 – MDI results are out. Not selected...not even in the waitlist..am I that bad. Maybe yes. With around 10 days to go, I left no stone unturned to prepare for the GD/PI. Next interview was NITIE in Mumbai on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2004 (which was my birthday too ☺).

March 7, 2004 – Disaster will be an understatement with what happened. I slept with a little back pain but just could not lift myself up from the bed. The pain in my lower back was killing me and even lying straight was not helping me. We rushed to the hospital and I was diagnosed with slip disc. 3 weeks bed

rest, no movement nothing. My NITIE was next day, IIFT in 3 days and IIML in 10 days. No way was I going to miss them.

I had to get admitted in the hospital and doctor did not allow me to move at all. This meant, all pleadings for attending interviews for NITIE were waste. IIFT also went by and I sat there who could not do anything about it – just cry a bit :mg: :mg: ok..not a bit but a little more.

I had my mind, come what may – I will attend my IIM interview. When doctor heard the word “IIM”, he also became a little soft and said that try to get it postponed as much as possible. We tried our best but date was still within my bed rest period. With a little change in his heart, he allowed me to take the interview.

The GD was bad for me as the pain was still there and it was bad. I had to wait for nearly 3 hours for my interview and this aggravated the pain. Somehow, I braved it and faced the interview panel.

It was an above average PI but performance in GD was still enough to ensure that I don't get in.

The results came and I was waitlisted at 107. This is when I joined PaGaLGuY and my first post was on the IIM L thread. After months of praying and tracking the WL day and night, it closed at 102!!!

I applied for a transfer to Mumbai to stay with my parents and take care of my back. Eventually the company did transfer me and here I landed in Mumbai. I joined the TIME test series and was doing pretty fine but the office culture here was really bad. For the first six months from July to December, there was not a single day when I did not contemplate resigning.

### **CAT No. 5: Year 2005 in November**

I added one more exam in my list – JMET. Exams came and went and somehow I screwed ALL of them. CAT 97 %ile, XAT 99 %ile, JMET – 500+ Rank and similarly all. All but one – FMS. Had calls from both the courses and went to Delhi for the interview. MS GD was average, PI was also average. Then came the FT day. That time, people having both FMS calls did not have process the same day, unlike today. Since I had become quite visible on PG, I met many familiar people. GD was excellent and PI was also good but FMS thought otherwise. My name did not figure in both the list, not even the waitlist. This was the very famous 1:1 ratio batch of FMS: mg: :mg:

One interesting thing about XAT. Had a 99.9+ in both DI and QA but 86.80 or something in Verbal. Basically I missed the verbal cutoff by .01% ☹

With 2 years work experience already in my kitty and entering my third year, GMAT option was also available. (just hang on for a bit, the other IIM is coming now ☺ ) In April, I registered for a June date for my GMAT and also joined TIME classes for CAT preparation. I knew it was NOW or NEVER. PG was a really big help for GMAT and after 3 months of study, I scored a 710. This is where I found the other IIM which stands for Indian IT Male :mg: :mg: Most of the applicants from India fall in this category and no wonder it is really difficult to get in US B-Schools when being an IIM ;)

Had plans to apply to 3 schools only – ISB, CMU Tepper and Goizueta Emory. The application process in these is a pain but in the end, it is quite insightful. One comes to know so much about oneself :mg: :mg: Coupled with this, I was attending classes in TIME and going to my job also. Somehow, I struck the right chord in Mocks and was posting on PG big time. I earned the label of “sophisticated spammer” which I still disagree to :mg: :mg: I am and never was a spammer ;)

Oct, Nov 2005 – Had interview calls from all 3 schools – ISB, Tepper and Goizueta. CAT day was also coming. I was done with my ISB interview (which was very very arbit) and Tepper interview over phone

before CAT. The last interview was scheduled in Mumbai in December as a part of the World MBA Tour. Both the US B-School interviews were pretty straight-forward – Why MBA, strengths, weakness etcetera etc.

### **CAT No. 6: Year 2006 in November**

The 5 options paper for CAT...man I had seen it all :mg: :mg: Started with Quant and killed it. Moved to the most arbit verbal paper ever and then did DI. When the solutions came in the evening, verbal had left me hanging..well almost. Btw, SP Jain was out of the hit list.

Dec 2006 – Jan 2007 → Worst time of my life. Rejects from ISB, Tepper and Goizueta. CAT result out. 100%ile in QA, 95 in DI and 82 in verbal. It was over for me. With just 5 days to go for XAT, I had no option but to give it my best. It was verbal and verbal and just more verbal.

7<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2007 – In the XAT paper itself, I knew that finally verbal is cracked. Meanwhile, JMET had given me a rank of 39 and calls from IIT B, D and KGP were on ☺ MDI also found me suitable for college, even NITIE thought the same :mg: :mg:

20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2007 – The evening before the FMS paper. Just went online for something and saw the XL result link. With all my confidence, I punched in my roll number and saw the line “Sorry....” WTF !!!! how how how....then clicked on the scorecard link. QA 99 something, Verbal 95.42..scorecard is not over yet..DI 77 %ile This is just not possible...gave up all hope of MBA.

Took the FMS exam and also prepared for the upcoming GDs and PIs. Then someone advised me about the MAT route to JBIMS and MHCET was also added on the exam taking list. MAT went awesome and 99.99%ile with a composite score of 800 ensured that JBIMS was there now. All the interviews came one by one and I attended all of the,. Some in Mumbai, some in Delhi..GOD it was maddening. Filling forms, carrying the requisite stuff etc was quite arduous.

Finally comes the news I was waiting to hear all my life. 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2007 2230 hrs. A friend of mine called from FMS and here it was – WL 1 :gm: :gm: :gm: FMS it was. MS was WL 7. Btw, I attended my MDI and IITB interviews after my FMS convert. Though, people advised me against it but they had taken a lot of my hard earned money :mg: :mg: so I decided to take them.

Well, in the end, I had all converts – FMS (both), JBIMS, IITs (all 3), MDI and NITIE. It was Delhi again for me.

I resigned from my job and then decided to utilize my time by teaching in TIME. This is where ARKSS Sir (ARKS Srinivas, TIME Director, Mumbai) said to me, “Amit, CAT ek baar aur likh de.” I was like no, never sir. I was tired of writing it. We left it there.

July came and I was in here – FMS ☺ Met some of the sharpest people in the country and some awesome faculty. After one month of grilling, I called up ARKSS and told him that FMS is not chill at all. And people, I am serious. During that phone call, again the CAT thing came up and he said “Mere liye likh de.” I told him I can't do it now anymore, no time to study and all. He somehow convinced me to fill the form and I did it. Just filled the form and no prep. No test series. There was no time in FMS. Initial work there, then summers, then exams..everything was packed. And whatever time I had in life, I ensured that I sleep well :mg: :mg:

## **CAT No. 7: Year 2007 in November**

CAT was on the 18<sup>th</sup> and our first semester exams got over on the 15<sup>th</sup> evening. 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> were spent in chilling out in life and 17<sup>th</sup> was taken away by room cleaning. The only sane thing I did on 17<sup>th</sup> was sleeping at 2230 hrs ;) Next day, I went to the exam centre which was nearby to the hostel, thankfully. From there, I called ARKSS again and told him that I still don't know why I am doing this. Finally, the paper started and it was exciting to do Maths after so many months. Did QA, then Verbal and finally DI. Came back to the room and slept. In the evening, got up and checked the score. QA and DI were fine but as always a 20 in verbal according to TIME keys. My score varied from 15 to 25 depending on institute keys. In either case, I was not clearing cut-off for verbal according to any of the institutes. So, it was over.

Life moved on, then came the day of the results. However bad one performs, there is always a desire to check the result (ok..i have it :mg: :mg: ) The link given on the CATIIM site was not working from the hostel. Then I came to know about the result by SMS thing. I SMSed and received the following reply.

QA (%ile) 99.98 with a score of 70

DI (%ile) 99.97 with a score of 76

Verbal (%ile) 96.40 with a score of 30

OA (%ile) 99.99 with a score of 176

YES YES YES I HAVE CRACKED IT !!! Calls started coming in and had all 6 calls. I was elated. But then, I had another problem. What will I say in the interview. FMS is awesome, why should one leave it. I had no clue what to do. The interview schedule came and the forms too. Took a lot of help from ARKSS for the same and prepared for the interview. I knew what to prepare – MBA acads and why chuck FMS for an IIM.

The first interview was IIML. A pretty decent GD and average PI. Next was IIMK. An average GD and bad PI. Indore was next but had a very important class to attend in FMS so decided against it. Btw, both K and L asked about FMS.

The Big One was next – Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. And man, I was nervous :mg: :mg: The essay was fine and PI was a dream one. They just could not believe that someone wants to leave FMS and come to IIMA. I think I did a pretty decent job there and rest of the questions varied from work experience to MBA Acads to general stuff in life.

IIM Calcutta was next. A decent case study discussion followed by stress interview. Was asked Maths, Sub Prime, Telecom War, Quiz, FMS and everything.

Bangalore was the last one to be held. The date clashed with my second semester exams of FMS and it must have taken like 10,000 calls to them to get it shifted. Finally, it was shifted to the evening slot of the same day with my exam in the morning and another exam the next morning and interview sandwiched in between :mg: :mg: The case study was the Scrablous one and the group was quite decent in discussing the stuff. I was last to be interviewed. It was HORRIBLE. It was so so so bad that they would have left a seat vacant in the college rather than taking me.

With interviews over, summer internship was something which was coming up. But, Supreme court had other plans. I was also a part of the waiting pain but had no window to vent out the frustration coz it was a secret I wanted to keep. Btw, my FMS classmates came to know about it somehow in January itself. I know who did it but have not done anything to that person ☺ But I still have time to do it :mg: :mg:

May 1 was about to dawn, I slept without much tension in life. Was woken at 7 a.m. by a friend's call informing me about IIMB results being out. I checked and as expected, did not get through. I had to go to the office and was on my way. Meanwhile, another friend called me and told me to check the WL of IIMB. He checked for me and no; I was not there ☹ as expected though.

I reached office and realized that Wi-Fi was not working on my laptop (Murphy's Law at its best). I went to IT guys and they needed "some" time to fix it. Just then, another person called me to tell me about IIMC results being out. I sat on the IT guys head and wanted my laptop back up and running. After 20-25 minutes of patience, laptop was handed back to me.

First thing I did was, checking the IIMC result. Opened the link, entered my details and my heart was beating fast as never before. And there it was. CONGRATULATIONS!!! :gm: :gm: :gm: Just could not believe. Tears of joy tricked down my eyes 😊😊 I was IN..FINALLY IN!!!!

Got through L and K too but surprisingly A ditched me. But no issues...JOKA I AM COMING :gm: :gm: :gm: :gm:

I want to clarify 2 things regarding which I have been receiving a lot of PMs.

1. Is FMS not good? - People, it is an awesome college; I just took CAT for the heck of it and my stay in FMS had nothing to do with it. So, please don't get me wrong here. Go ahead and join without battling an eyelid.
2. Justifying interview panel about leaving FMS and going to IIM – The answer was a very planned out one and was structured in a way so that no cross questioning was possible..thanks to ARKSS sir again :mg: :mg:

Some of the quotes which I had heard over so many years are really true

1. Patience pays
2. Efforts never go waste
3. Samay se pehle aur kismet se zyada kuch nahin milta and the likes.

But my personal favourite is the one which my cousin said once she heard the result – "Finally, CAT ki aatma ko shanti mili" :mg: :mg: :mg: