

Twists and Turns

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Change is a law of nature. Like most other things, life also has its ups and downs. Like a see-saw, one can be riding high, only to come down after a while. Sometimes, destiny offers unexpected opportunities, and at other times everything is snatched away. Fortune tellers have used this unpredictability, surprises and miracles to run a booming business. If we look around and probe a little more closely, we will find that almost every person has faced ripples and a significant proportion has had major oscillations in their lives. Peaks and troughs of these oscillations vary in each case. Same can be said about the ability to handle the change with resolve and determination. Most of such information remains private and protected with only a few people around them who come to know the real situation.

Everything bad that happens is not always someone's fault. There are invisible forces of destiny. Accidents, unexpected illness, natural disasters such as floods, wild-fires etc. can change one's fortune in a heartbeat. We deal with adversities using our education, hard work, resolve, determination, inspiration from role models, focus, right decision at the turning points, and support from friends and family. A helping hand from a stranger sometimes can also break the free-fall and steer one back to a path to success.

The purpose of writing this piece is not to say that there are major reversals in every life. The purpose is to stress the point that one should never lose hope during tough times. With the right move, hard work and resolve, misfortunes can be reversed. While there are many examples of people going down from high positions and social status, there also are countless examples of individuals rising from bottom to top in almost every field. Life sketch of such success stories inspire others and generates hope for uplifting one's life instead of compromising with the circumstances. Sitting and sulking does not change fortunes. Prayers are not sufficient either. Considerable effort, planning and hard work are needed to rise from bottom to top. In this article, I highlight lives of some of such inspiring individuals who rose to the top through their hard work and determination. Details of people who went downhill after reaching places are spared here to maintain a tone of hope and optimism.

Eleventh President of India and aerospace scientist, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam had rich ancestors. However, their business failed, properties were lost and the family became

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poor. Young Kalam sold newspapers to supplement his family's income. He was bright and hardworking and above all undeterred, paving his way to the top. Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi helped his father sell tea and ran his own tea stall later.

To cite a few examples from business, Mohan Singh Oberoi, born in a small village Braun, Pakistan became owner of several luxury hotels and resorts all over the world. He had very ordinary educational qualifications given the financial status of the family. His first job was in a shoe factory. Later, he worked as a clerk in a luxury hotel in Simla named Cecil. After gaining some insight into operational aspects of the hotel business, he joined hands with like-minded associates acquiring struggling hotels and turning them around. This is how his journey started. Later, he continued this line of work independently. This is how the Oberoi group was formed, offering one of the finest hotel chain on the planet.

Who does not use MDH spices? Mahashay Dharampal Gulati , the owner of MDH, a spice company, migrated to India after partition, stayed in refugee camp in Amritsar and finally came to Delhi to find work. Back in Pakistan, his father sold spices at a shop called Mahashiyan Di Hatti and young Dharampal assisted his father. Initially, after migration, he lived under pathetic conditions. He bought a tanga to ferry passengers from Connaught Place to Karol Bagh. This was , however , not enough to meet even his basic necessities. Sick of constant humiliation from the passengers, he decided to get back into his family's original business. He opened a small spices shop in Karol Bagh. His hard work bore fruits. Today, MDH is the most familiar spice brand in domestic as well as overseas markets.

Dhirubhai Ambani was born in Chorwad, Gujarat in a family with meagre means . He started his working life as an attendant in a gas station. He then worked as a clerk in A Besse & Company, Yemen , a transcontinental trading firm. He learnt a variety of skills while at job, and after shifting to Mumbai started trading in clothing and spices, calling his business Reliance Commercial Corporation. His hard work and business acumen led him to become one the most successful business tycoons of our time

There are many such examples. Narayan Murthy, the founder of Infosys, Karsanbhai Patel, owner of the popular brand Nirma had similar story from rags to riches behind them.

In the world of entertainment, there are several examples of people rising to heights of fame from complete obscurity. Gulshan Kumar , the movie producer and founder of T series music label helped his father who was a fruit juice vendor on the streets of Daryaganj, Delhi. Jonny Walker was a bus conductor before he joined film industry as a comedian. Rajnikanth worked as a carpenter, cooli, and as a bus conductor before he joined MGR Film and Television Institute of Tamil Nadu. Famous actors such as Raaj Kumar, Akshay Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan also come from rather humble backgrounds.

Sports is another area where one finds innumerable cases of dramatic upturn and fame due to sheer grit and focus. The list is long and includes celebrities like Mary Kom, a woman boxer from Manipur who worked in fields with her parents and took care of her siblings since her very young age. Milkha Singh walked ten km bare feet to reach his school, saw his family murdered at the time of partition, and contemplated becoming a dacoit at a low point in life. However on pursuance of a friend , he joined Indian Army and got exposed to athletics. His achievements speak for themselves. Daughter of an auto rickshaw driver and a nurse, Deepika Kumari is now world number two archer. Her parents were not in a position to buy her the archery equipment, she practiced with home made bow and arrow. Vijender Singh, an acclaimed boxer from Haryana also had a humble background. P.T. Usha, belonged to not only a poor family but also had several health problems as a child. Yet she got laurels for herself and for the country by getting more than 100 medals and 30 international honours and titles for excellence in athletics.

Eknath Solker, still considered the best fielder and catcher in cricket history lived with his 5 siblings in a hut close to Hindu Gymkhana in Mumbai, where his father worked as a groundsman. His determination and hard work bore fruits making him one of the most beloved athlete of his time. Tony Greig considered him to be the best forward short leg (a field position where the fielder stands very close to the batsman) ever.

This is encouraging indeed! But setbacks in life are not uncommon either. Some downfalls are temporary but in many unfortunate cases the downfall is of a long duration. Wrong moves of career, reckless risk taking, wrong investment choices, bad company, cheating, health issues, too much dependence on employees or partners, callous next generation, arrogance or age factor may lead to a journey downhill. For instance, Vijay Mallya, had a flourishing Kingfisher group with his alcohol business doing very well. But Kingfisher Airlines launched by him and perhaps lavish life-style and over-indulgence took down his entire fortune and now he is a wanted man, hiding in another country on charges of embezzlement of bank money. Setbacks in business can happen in any circumstance. However, decline is more likely when business and wealth are inherited by next generation that opens its eyes in affluence but is not able to fully understand the efforts needed to keep the business flourishing and is unable to take care of its fortune. In sports and entertainment sectors, age becomes the major factor in declining performance.

The only thing certain in life is change. It does not take much to guess what kind of approach people who went uphill must have had. Some may say they were destined to be rich, famous and successful. But to the author, while not discounting the destiny, common for all was their आगे बढ़ो approach; grabbing opportunities; right associations; right decisions at the right time with strong will power and a ज़ुबान to lead the life with courage as forces behind their journey to the top. Name, fame and success are never a cakewalk for the first generation. Those who inherit good-fortune must value it and move with a caution that there will be twists and turns that may take anyone riding high straight to the bottom. So, be aware and be prepared.

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