

Akshata Ajit Mayekar - (Lila Girl-2014)

I am Akshata Mayekar and I come from a simple family where education, values and respect are given utmost importance. I had always been the bright student in my school when it came to academics, co-curricular as well as extra-curricular activities right from kindergarten. I am an avid dancer and have cleared 5 levels of Bharatnatyam from Nalanda University with a rank and distinction. Dance is my hobby, my passion and it makes me happy. I am lucky to be raised in a family where studies and extra-curricular activities both are treated equally important and I was always given the freedom to choose what I want.

Ever since childhood I have considered my father as my hero, my idol. But it was after his sudden demise that I realised what it takes to be strong woman. Losing a parent is never easy at any age of life. I lost my father at the age of 9 and life became a new challenge for me and my mother. We moved to my uncle's place in another city, new school, new place, my mom started working. It was altogether a new and different life for us. A life without my father. Nevertheless, I will always be short of words for whatever sacrifices my uncle has done for my mom (his sister) and me. Whatever I could survive before getting this scholarship, I owe everything to him. Eventually, I realised what it takes for a single mother to play a two in one role and raise a child with the same values without falling. She has always supported me.

I truly believe that "Everything happens for a reason." I cleared my SSC with stupendous score but couldn't do that great in HSC. It was because I opted engineering only to realise I was never meant for it.

Circumstances pushed me to take a decision and move to Pune and pursue my graduation in Pharma and medicine but most importantly to realise what truly lies inside me.

It was after that my life took a new turn because "The Lila Poonawalla Scholarship" happened! To be very honest, the scholarship interview was the first ever interview of my life. I remember this so vividly that I had cried in the bathroom after my interview because I didn't find myself satisfying, I spoke about all of my history and I became weak. I had least expected this scholarship for me but one fine day I got a call while I was getting ready for my college exam "Congratulations, you are chosen for the Lila Poonawalla Scholarship and the felicitation dates will be informed to you." I couldn't contain my happiness. "The best things happen at the most unexpected times."

During felicitation I met so many other girls who had probably been through a lot more than me. That was such a driving force of inspiration and I learnt that never consider yourself unfortunate and always be grateful for what you have. The spark that I could see in every girl was so zealous that just by looking at them I shifted my way of perceiving things in a better way and this was just the beginning. Lila Poonawalla scholarship has always been a blessing for me and I am fortunate enough to have Padmashree Lila Poonawalla (Mom) and dear philosopher Firoz Poonawalla (Dad) so close to me today. Mom is doing a great job for all the girls out there and I wish to be like her in near future. Dad's first ever words to us still resonate in my ears in his voice "Always be generous."

The best part about this scholarship are the workshops and it has proven to be of great benefit to me. The arrangements, the mentors, and the venue everything is done so perfectly. Not only did it have a great impact on my academics but it helped me move a step closer to knowing myself better. "Emotional intelligence" programme taught us to speak up your fears, your past and your insecurities without feeling weak. Something that all of us need to learn. Learning to be brave. "Self-defence" programme, a superb initiative by the foundation which all women must know in today's world. The list of such workshops is endless and indeed marvellous but I would earnestly like to thank Mom for bringing me closer to "Toastmasters International." Since childhood, I have always loved being on the stage but with Toastmasters I discovered my leadership and speaking skills and this is very important in the professional world today. My personality developed threefold and today I feel more confident about myself. I also resumed cultural activities in college which was much needed.

2017 has been a year of great achievements for me. I again topped my college exams, got selected for the long awaited dream of “The Peace Ambassador’s Programme” by the foundation. I also qualified the zonal level of “Avishkar competition” held by AICTE where I presented my research and last but not the least my biggest break of life-My France Internship.

I went to France for an internship of 2 months June-July 2017 where I worked with my guide in the Biopharmaceutics subject. We did a research on cell culture of Caco-2 cell lines i.e. opening of tight junctions of cancer cells of colon by excipients and a brief work on Probiotic encapsulated microparticles for the treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD). People here do work hard but they work smart. I am still in France mentally because I am so impressed by the work pattern, the laboratories, the people and the entire country as such. I stayed in the city of Clermont Ferrand, a small yet beautiful city situated in the region of Auvergne. The famous dormant volcanic mountain Puy de Dome, the prominent public square Place de Jaude and the well-known gothic style Clermont Ferrand Cathedral are the major sites of attraction here. During weekends, I visited Vichy which is also called as town of spa because of the famous hot water springs in the Le Lac d’ Allier (river). Lyon which is the second largest city of France and Paris are the metropolitan cities with many tourist attractions like the Basilica Notre dame (Cathedral) on the hill and international news centre Euronews in Lyon. Eiffel Tower and Louvre museum are one of the major attractions in Paris. People in France commute via trams, buses and underground railway. Despite language problem, the French people co-operated very well and are really helpful in nature.

My views regarding my career has changed a lot in these 4 years and I can’t thank the foundation enough for grooming me into what I am today. I am glad and immensely proud to be a part of the Lila Poonawalla family and I will always stick around till the end.

To all the beautiful and strong women out there, as you climb ladders of success in your career don’t forget to pursue your hobby as well. Be happy and do what makes you happy.

I am taking baby steps toward achieving my goals both personal and professional. Further, I wish to work with the USFDA and also resume my Bharatnatyam lessons.

My dear sisters, don’t be in a rush, take your own time to identify and cross your milestone. Success is not a destination but a journey, don’t limit your success by setting a goal, it will only make you dormant after you achieve it. Make small goals in life and keep achieving them.

And most importantly as a woman, do not forget “Never let any external factor diminish your charm” Know what you are, realise your potential and let go off what drains you out. You are stronger than you know and you can do better than your own imagination.

I wish you all the luck and success to soar high in life. Let us lead!