

When I Grow Up
I Want to Be...

When I Grow Up I Want to Be...

Fantastic stories about
real-life Indians

From the editors of
Tweak India

Illustrated by Aaryama Somayaji

tweakbooks

 **juggernaut**

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Foreword

I hope some day one of you invents a machine that can take dreary adults and turn them back into curious young people.

Isn't it odd that small people have big dreams and big people, well, their dreams are so small? Get a job. Buy a house. Sleep late on Sunday. Go on a holiday.

Adults, especially these days, rarely look up from their phones, let alone throw their heads back and stare at all the wonders in the night sky.

Young people, like you, look at the world through eyes that marvel, have minds that live

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in fantastical worlds and possess hearts that haven't learnt to fear.

Then how do all you wonderfully imaginative young people turn into boring big people?

It happens when everyone around you repeatedly tells you the difference between possible and impossible dreams.

A line is drawn, at first it is invisible, but over time, with more and more people telling you the same thing, you too start seeing that line.

Believing in limits is a very powerful thing. It doesn't just change your dreams, it changes your capabilities.

For almost a hundred years, it was believed that people were not capable of running a mile in four minutes. It was, that word again, 'impossible'.

Then in 1954, the lanky Roger Bannister ran down a track on a cold, wet day. He ran like he was chasing a comet and he became a bonafide star.

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Then a strange thing happened.

Just a year later, three runners beat the 4-minute barrier and now more than a thousand runners have done the same.

Why was something impossible to break now being broken by so many?

Two Wharton School professors spent months analysing this singular event and came to a simple conclusion: it was all down to belief.

Once people saw Bannister cross that imaginary line from impossible to possible, they believed it could be done and it was not a barrier any more.

All the people you will read about in this book are ordinary people, but they managed to do extraordinary things because they too believed it could be done. The boy who failed his tenth board exams but went on to invent a refrigerator that doesn't use electricity. The fifteen-year-old girl who broke Tendulkar's record. The lawyers

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who slayed draconian laws. The eight-year-old Chhote Master who taught children in 125 villages. The girl who lost a leg and still climbed Mount Everest. The young man who gave people a prosthetic helping hand.

Not a single one among them is a dreary creature, not even among the oldest adults.

Like Bannister, they are all stars, shining brightly, a navigational guide showing you that there are no limits or barriers that can't be crossed.

Follow them. Outdo them. Change the world by turning it upside down if that's what it takes. Pursue all your seemingly impossible dreams and one day we will look up and see all of you, a constellation of stars setting the night sky on fire.

Twinkle Khanna

The doctors who started a
revolution from a small village



Drs Rani and Abhay Bang

In one corner of Maharashtra sits the district of Gadchiroli. It looks nothing like the big cities we see on the television. Here the forest is so dense you will probably lose your way even if you have Google Maps. On windy days, the trees dance and children play games in their shadows.

The tribals in Gadchiroli have always lived a simple life. They leave their brick homes in the morning to work in the forests and fields nearby, returning only when the sun sets and the stars wink from the velvet night sky.

On the surface, everything looked ideal, but there was an evil creeping through Gadchiroli

and haunting the villagers. Many little babies were falling sick. They would cry all night, their skin turning blue because they couldn't breathe. Many of them didn't survive.

With doctors' clinics miles away, the villagers were helpless. They prayed to the goddess Maa Danteshwari to save them.

Out of the blue, Dr Rani Bang and her husband, Dr Abhay, arrived in Gadchiroli. It was as if the villagers' prayers had travelled like whispers to the doctors' ears.

The Bangs had just returned to India after finishing their studies in a famous college in the United States. They could have picked any city in the world to set up their practice – making lots of money and living comfortably – but the couple was influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

They settled down in Gadchiroli because they wanted to work in a place that needed them desperately.

They started doing weekly clinics, but few villagers came to them. The doctors were puzzled. ‘Both babies and grown-ups are falling ill, so why aren’t they coming to us?’ they wondered.

The doctors realized the villagers were too busy earning a living during the day to talk about their health problems. And they were probably thinking, ‘Why should we trust these strange doctors from the city who don’t know anything about our life?’

So Rani and Abhay decided to join the villagers around a bonfire at night where they gathered to talk about their day. As the flames rose into the twinkling night sky, they got to know each other, and the doctors slowly earned the villagers’ trust.

Then the Bangs did what no one had done before. They asked the villagers what *they* needed, and how they could help them improve their health.

Rani thought to herself, 'If I have to educate the people, I must first educate myself on how to talk to them.' Listening to people, especially women, became her mission.

The Bangs began to understand the villagers' way of life and how they liked to do things. They worked with them instead of trying to force their medical knowledge on them.

As they collected more information through their night-time chats, they realized that it wasn't a curse or demon making the babies sick in Gadchiroli. It was a common enough illness known to the world as pneumonia.

'We can't wait for the babies to go to a hospital,' Abhay said. 'The hospital needs to go where the babies are.'

In Gadchiroli, dais or midwives looked after newborn babies and their mothers. The Bangs began training the dais on how to properly take care of a newborn baby. Abhay even invented a

test that the dais could do on their own to check if the babies had pneumonia.

And they started teaching the villagers basic childcare practices, such as washing their hands before touching babies and keeping the little ones warm at night so that they wouldn't fall sick so easily.

This hospital-at-home idea that the Bangs introduced became so popular that other states started following their methods. Countries as distant as Ethiopia and Tanzania also adopted this approach.

Gadchiroli was becoming home for the Bangs. They decided to build a hospital unlike any other in the country with the help of the villagers. A 'tribal hospital'.

This hospital would have no tall buildings and buzzing machines; instead, it would look like the huts in the village.

Doctors didn't wear white uniforms because

the villagers believed that white was the colour of mourning, and it scared them.

The patients' families were allowed to stay with them and cook their own food on an open fire. Most importantly for the villagers, at the entrance to the hospital was a temple of Maa Danteshwari.

Named after their deity, the Maa Danteshwari Dawakhana combined the facilities of a city hospital with the cosiness of home.

The Bangs went on to create their own tiny 'science village' called Shodgram, where they now run the hospital, do research and teach the villagers how to look after themselves and each other.

Just by listening, being humble and adapting to the needs of others, Rani and Abhay saved hundreds of lives. And taught the world that we're capable of amazing feats if we respect each other and work together.

The man who started the world's
largest beach clean-up



Afroz Shah

When Afroz Shah was a child, Versova beach was his playground. With the wind blowing through his tangled brown hair, the smell of the salty seawater would tickle his nose as he twiddled his toes in the sand. Each wave brought a new thrill and he would jump around and dance with the rolling water.

The young boy grew up, studied hard and became a lawyer. In 2015, he was excited to move into a new apartment that looked on to the beach that had given him so much joy in his childhood. But after all those years, the beach looked nothing like it did in the photos in his album.

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Now the sand was barely visible! All you could see were heaps of plastic bags, chips packets, bottles, caps and dirty rags, a soggy mess. It broke his heart. Nobody was doing anything about it, so he decided it was going to be him.

He roped in his eighty-four-year-old neighbour. Putting on trackpants, sneakers and rubber gloves, they headed to the beach.

Down on their hands and knees, they started picking up the garbage and removing it from the beach. In some places, the piles of plastic were almost as high as Afroz himself.

People started noticing him. Who was this crazy man, they wondered, wading around in garbage on a Sunday morning, while others were relaxing, watching movies or playing cricket with their friends?

They would come up to him and ask, 'Afroz Bhai, you are such an accomplished lawyer, why

are you picking up garbage? Complain to the government and let someone else handle it.’

But Afroz would say, ‘I spent my childhood here. I have a special connection with this ocean. Why should I wait for the government? I am also responsible for protecting the environment.’

Before their very eyes, the locals saw their neighbourhood transforming from a landfill to a sandy beach again! Inspired, hundreds of people began to join in, from schoolchildren to their grandparents to politicians and movie stars.

They were at the beach every weekend, and you could easily spot Afroz in the crowd by his floppy black hat.

He also went from door to door, talking to the residents of the slums by the beach. Teaching them to separate their food waste from plastic and to dispose of their garbage correctly was another big step in this fight.

What began with just two men was now the

world's largest beach clean-up. Afroz and his volunteers had removed over 20 million kilos of trash. That's twice as heavy as a Rajdhani Express!

More beach clean-ups sprouted all over the country, as citizens began to realize that they had to take responsibility for keeping their surroundings clean, instead of waiting for someone else or the government to do all the work.

Now in Versova, families can have picnics on the sand. Children play in the waves as the birds go cheep-cheep as they fly by. The setting sun lights up the sea and the water sparkles as if thousands of little diamonds are floating on it.

And the biggest prize of all – after more than twenty years, the Olive Ridley turtles returned to the clean beach to nest.

Afroz personally stood guard to make sure they were unharmed, watching as the little baby