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## Context to the nugget

Roopa talks about how she grew up amidst nature in the North Eastern part of India and how some of her perspectives on working women started getting shaped right from an age of around 10. She also talks about her first brush with Mumbai when she comes to pursue a B.Com in Sydenham College but quickly find the city overwhelming and goes back to Guwahati to pursue B.Sc. in Mathematics. She also talks about the peculiar situation where despite clearing the entrance process for IIMA, she is unable to join. She decides to teach in a primary school and appears for CAT yet again.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** In your journey are there two three things that you want to talk about in terms of what got shaped let's say may be in first 15-18 years which still forms a core part of who you are?

**Roopa Kudva (RK):** I think one of the biggest formative influences is where I grew up and I grew up in the small towns of Assam and what is now Meghalaya it was a very simple upbringing close to nature and lots of books, so I think, on a typical holiday for example we would be outdoors spending a lot of time in the pine forest alongside brooks and dapple sunshine streaming through, so it was a very different world and quite unlike Bombay and I think the simplicity of the entire environment and the simplicity of the life in that place I think really was a major influence in shaping who I was and who I became another formative influence would be sometime around in the time I was 10 or 11 year old, when I started noticing, how people used to react to women who were working, my own mother till then who was a home maker started working and then I noticed several women who are working in different professions, some of our family friends were bureaucrats and they were women and I noticed that people around them treated them differently, they were treated with more respect, if I may use the word and that had an impact on me, of course at that time we had powerful influences like Indira Gandhi being prime minister and all of that and I think that had an impact and then later into my teenage years I think I became increasingly conscious of the fact that I was from a small town and a remote part of the country and maybe in some way my exposure was limited and so therefor I consciously looked for ways to expand my horizon and I remember I would spend hours and hours during a day listening to the BBC not just to know what was going on in the world but also to learn how to talk and I think that was another influence and finally I would say, there was a conversation that I just happen to overhear between my parents and it was not something that they said directly to me but something I overheard once, where my mother was talking about the fact that it was very important for women to be financially independent and it was not something they ever said to me, it was the conversation that I overheard once and that stuck

with me and I do think that in some way it's kind of played a big role in how I thought about myself in my life and the future.

DJ: And just fast forwarding to undergrad to postgrad sort of inflection point I understand there was a little bit of complication into you getting into IIMA and I understand you had to write CAT twice, talk to us about that inflection point and what happened there?

RK: So, I graduated from Cotton college in Guwahati and I graduated in statistics and mathematics and before that after I finished my school I actually had to come to Bombay for a year and join Sydenham college where I was hoping to do my B.Com and within the few weeks of my coming to Bombay I realized that I just hate this place I couldn't adjust, I had grown up in small towns, I found this city quite overwhelming and at the end of one year I told my parents I want to come back and to their credit they didn't say why, I think they could figure out that this wasn't working for me and they were very gracious about it so I went back to Guwahati and I took up statistics and mathematics and I had to start a fresh. And then in 1983 was when I got admission into IIM-A and I was due to join on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1983 and at that time IIM expected us to have our graduation mark sheet but because of the anti-foreigner agitation and the students movement our exams got postponed and on July 1 I didn't even have, not only that I don't have mark sheets, I haven't written my graduation exams till then and so I requested IIM to see if they could defer my admission to next year not knowing whether this was the fluke or whether I would even get in another time and unfortunately their rules at that time did not allow a deferral, which is why I had to write the exams again next year and take the interview and fortunately I made it a second time and it turns out it wasn't so bad after all, in the interim I was the school teacher I taught in a kindergarten school and it was interesting that I had no plan B, if I didn't get into IIMA there was no other plan, so I would probably have ended up becoming a school teacher.

DJ: Very different path to social impact but very interesting.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of things struck me here:

First is the extent to which smallest of things influences us in our childhood. Roopa talks about overhearing her parents talking about the importance of women working. One of my earlier guests, Anu Madgavkar (AM) spoke about how what one of her cousins said had a profound influence on her.

AM: *"I am happy to say that with all this super idealistic upbringing I had there was also a voice of reason and then came from a much unexpected quarter, so after I graduated, I had a degree in economics and I was wondering what to do next? And I had gotten into the IIMs but I was also toying with this idea of maybe I should even go and do like a masters in economics or something completely different there was this slightly romantic idea of what else I would like to do and then there was this cousin of mine who was not particular influence in my life at that point but out of the blue he just said you are a girl and you should remember that it is very important for you to be financial independent because you don't know what your circumstances are going to be you should be able to earn your own living and live well and stand in your own field."*

DJ: No one answer here but it is fascinating to see how much impact a small thing like a cousin saying something or overhearing parents talking about something can have on people's lives and profoundly shape their attitudes and choices.

The second takeaway for me is about resilience. It is fascinating to see how individuals often go through a rough patch early on in their journeys but they don't give up and don't settle for less. One of my earlier guests was Dheeraj Pandey (DP), Chairman of Nutanix, a company that is based in the valley valued at more than 3.5 Billion dollars. He speaks about how he got into IIT the first time but with a lower rank. He decided to go back and study again and find his way to Computer Science.

DP: *"So you have always thought about the worst case and if the worst was not bad enough the risk will worth it that's the way I took to my early years so I went to IIT in 1992 but I had a rank of 1420 and I realized that to get a brand change I would be lesser probability than I were to quit and go back and take JEE one more time and get CS the probability go higher that way, and the probability was from the inside, I was there for two months, I was there till October and most people like what are you doing? You have a great thing going here and by the way worst case you will get EE and that's a good enough and so on and I said I just haven't tried hard enough, let me just give it a trial because the probability is way better there and I knew that worst case I will just do physics, maybe do St. Stephen and do physics and there still be a path from there or something like that, if the worst is not bad enough then I will just take that so I think I have used at throughout life actually, if the worst is not bad enough then just go do it."*

DJ: It is interesting to see how some of the leaders are resilient right from their early years.

Thank you for listening. If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to YouTube and type "PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017". I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. If you want to listen offline say during a car ride home or during airplane travel, you could also access the Podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn and several other podcast apps. Google has recently launched an app for podcast listening on Android platforms too. If you went to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com), you would also have the opportunity to listen to multiple voices curated by a topic. Play lists topics include – Reinventing Self (which is about how people changed trajectories significantly), Early formative years where leaders talk about how their childhood has influenced them profoundly, Insight on career paths (various professionals talk about the ups and downs of their career and how individuals should think about embarking on that path)

If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it. Thank you for listening.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Anu Madgavkar that is referenced: [Early formative years](#).

Nugget from Dheeraj Pandey that is referenced: [Early formative years \(including re-attempting IIT-JEE\)](#).

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## Roopa Kudva - Nuggets

- 29.00 Roopa Kudva - The Full Conversation
- 29.01 Roopa Kudva - Omidyar Network and innovating for next Half Billion
- 29.02 Roopa Kudva - Early formative years
- 29.03 Roopa Kudva - Growing through the ranks at CRISIL
- 29.04 Roopa Kudva - Transitioning to a General Management role
- 29.05 Roopa Kudva - Choosing career direction post CRISIL
- 29.06 Roopa Kudva - Flexing leadership style at Omidyar Network
- 29.07 Roopa Kudva - Developing a sense of judgment
- 29.08 Roopa Kudva - Women Leadership - The barrier that doesn't get spoken about as much
- 29.09 Roopa Kudva - Perspectives on Success
- 29.10 Roopa Kudva - What they don't teach you at IIMA but should
- 29.11 Roopa Kudva - In summary - Playing to Potential

## About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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