



**GOOD MORNING
SHER/SHERNIYO !**

**GOOD MORNING
FOODNA HAI HUME JEEVAN MEIN BAHUT
ISLYE KAAM KARNA HAI
ACHA KAAM KARNA HAI
BEHTAREEN KAAM KARNA HAI
AUR BEHTAREEN JEEVAN KHUD HI BAN JAYEGA**

When Aashi Verma was born on a damp July morning in a small district hospital in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the nurse who lifted her into the yellow tube-light paused for a second too long before handing her to her mother, and that silence became the first wound of Aashi's life. Her upper lip was split from the center toward one nostril, and though she was breathing, crying, alive and warm, the room had already begun looking at her like she was a tragedy before she had even opened her eyes properly. Her grandmother turned

away. One aunt whispered, “Bhagwan ne kaisi pariksha di hai.” Her father stood near the rusted iron bed and stared at the wall as if he had suddenly forgotten how to be happy. Only her mother, exhausted and trembling with fever, held her close and kissed her forehead without hesitation, as though she did not see the cleft at all, as though she saw only a child who had arrived after nine months of waiting. But outside that hospital room, the world noticed only the scar before it noticed the soul. Aashi grew up in a narrow lane where children ran barefoot behind bicycle tires and women exchanged gossip across balconies like passing buckets of water, and in that lane everybody knew her before they knew her name. Some called her “the girl with the cut lip.” Some asked her mother if treatment was possible as if Aashi were not standing

right beside them listening. Some children imitated the way she spoke, exaggerating sounds and laughing till they bent over with delight. Aashi learned very early that cruelty often wears the face of casual conversation. By the time she entered school, she had mastered the art of lowering her face while speaking. During attendance, when teachers called “Aashi Verma,” she said “Present Ma’am” without lifting her eyes. During group recitation, she spoke softer than everyone else. During photographs, she stood in the last row. Her notebooks were neat, her handwriting elegant, her marks extraordinary, but none of those things arrived in a room before her face did. She underwent surgery at seven in a government hospital after years of waiting, travel, loans, and endless consultations. The operation softened

the visible cleft but did not erase it completely. A pale line remained over her lip like memory stitched into skin. Her speech improved, but some words still resisted her. “P” and “B” occasionally escaped differently. Enough for people to notice. Enough for mockery to survive. Her mother would oil her hair every Sunday and say, “People will first look at your face, beta, but if you stay in front of them long enough, one day they will have to look into your eyes.” Aashi didn’t fully believe it then, but she carried the sentence inside her like a private inheritance. In class ten she topped her district. People arrived at their home with sweets. The same neighbors who once advised her mother to “accept fate” now praised her discipline. Relatives suddenly began telling others, “Ladki bahut tez hai.” Yet even then admiration

came with pity wrapped inside it. “Bas shakal mein thoda...” they would say before stopping midway. Every compliment seemed to come injured. She learned that society often rewards achievement but rarely abandons prejudice. After graduation, when many of her classmates began preparing for MBA entrances or private jobs, Aashi chose banking exams. Not because it was easy. Nothing had ever been easy. But because the exam paper, unlike people, did not stare. The paper did not hesitate after hearing her speak. The paper did not ask what happened to her lip. It simply asked reasoning, English, arithmetic, awareness. And if you knew the answer, it rewarded you. There was justice in that. Brutal, difficult, competitive justice—but justice. She began preparing for IBPS PO from a rented room above a tailoring shop

where the fan made a ticking sound all night and traffic entered through the broken window frame like an uninvited guest. Her day began before sunrise. She revised vocabulary while tea boiled. She solved puzzles while neighborhood shops opened shutters. She read editorials aloud to improve fluency though she hated hearing her own voice. Mock tests became mirrors she could improve. Some days she scored well enough to dream. Some days she failed sectional cutoffs and cried into the pillow so her roommate wouldn't hear. Money was scarce. Coaching was impossible. She used free PDFs, borrowed books, old notebooks from seniors, YouTube lectures on low data mode, and relentless repetition. Her father's tailoring business was declining. Her mother stitched blouse sleeves for women in the neighborhood for extra

income. There were evenings when electricity disappeared and Aashi sat under a rechargeable emergency lamp solving quadratic equations while mosquitoes circled her ankles. There were family weddings she skipped. Festivals she studied through. Birthdays she forgot. People asked, “Bank exam hi dena hai? Kitne saal aur?” Some said girls should not postpone marriage for uncertain exams. One distant relative, while sipping tea in their home, casually remarked, “Waise bhi ladki ko itna pressure lene ki kya zarurat hai.” Aashi heard every word from the kitchen. That night she studied till three. Not out of inspiration. Out of rage. Her first attempt—prelims cleared, mains missed. Second attempt—missed prelims by 1.25 marks. She stopped speaking to almost everyone for a week. Third attempt—interview list missed

narrowly. That result broke something in her. She sat beside the terrace water tank after midnight with her result open on the phone and wondered how many times a person can rebuild herself before exhaustion becomes permanent. Her mother came upstairs carrying a steel glass of milk. She didn't give advice. She just sat beside her in silence. After a long while she said, "You have spent your whole life surviving what others said about your face. Don't lose now because of what an exam says about your score." Aashi laughed through tears because only a mother could say something so devastatingly simple. Then came the year that changed everything. She prepared differently. More strategically. Less emotionally. More mock analysis. More revision. Fewer panic hours. She began speaking answers aloud every day to

prepare for the interview despite fearing her own pronunciation. She recorded herself and listened. Again and again. It was unbearable in the beginning. Then tolerable. Then normal. Then powerful. On interview day she wore a pale blue kurta and tied her hair neatly. In the waiting hall she noticed polished shoes, expensive watches, fluent English, confident posture. Old insecurity returned like fever. She almost wished to disappear. But when her name was called and she entered the panel room, one member smiled and asked, "Tell us about yourself." For the first time in years, Aashi did not lower her face while speaking. Her voice trembled for ten seconds, then steadied. She spoke of economics, banking awareness, financial inclusion, rural credit. She answered on NPAs, priority sector lending, inflation. One

interviewer asked what shaped her resilience. She paused. Then said softly, "Sir, when society keeps reminding you what you lack, discipline becomes the only way to prove what you carry." The room went quiet. They nodded. Weeks later results were declared on a humid afternoon while her mother was drying papads on the terrace. Aashi opened the PDF on her phone with hands trembling so hard she mistyped the roll number twice. Then she found it. Not almost. Not waiting list. Not missed by decimals. Selected. IBPS PO. Final selection. She stared for several seconds because the mind sometimes takes time to believe what the eyes have already seen. Then she screamed. A raw sound. Half laughter, half sobbing, years collapsing into one breath. Her mother came running downstairs terrified, until Aashi held the phone out with shaking fingers.

Her mother read the line once and sat on the floor and cried like someone who had finally set down a burden carried for decades. Her father, who rarely expressed emotion, removed his spectacles and wiped his face quietly with the edge of his shirt. Neighbors gathered. Sweets were distributed. Phones kept ringing. Messages poured in. Some congratulated. Some sounded shocked. Some proud. Some performative. By evening the lane that once whispered about the girl with the cleft was saying, "Our Aashi became Probationary Officer." Children who had mocked her now brought flowers from nearby stalls. But late that night, after everyone slept, Aashi stood before the mirror in her room. The tube-light reflected off the familiar scar over her lip. Same face. Same line. Same girl. Society had not erased her stigma. India

still offered no reservation for people like her. The interview panel had not selected her out of sympathy. The exam had not softened because life was unfair. She had crossed it herself—through humiliation, persistence, ridicule, surgeries, failed attempts, financial struggle, and endless discipline. She touched the scar gently with her fingers and for the first time did not wish it away. It had been witness to every insult she survived and every answer she gave back without words. Outside, somewhere far away, a temple bell rang into the midnight air. A dog barked in the lane. A scooter passed. Ordinary sounds of an ordinary town. But inside that small room, something extraordinary had become true: the girl people once pitied had become the woman they would now point to as proof that stigma may shape a

beginning, but it does not have the authority to decide an ending.

1. Stigma — social shame attached to something

Hindi: कलंक / सामाजिक दाग

2. Tragedy — terrible misfortune

Hindi: दुखद घटना

3. Cruelty — harshness; lack of kindness

Hindi: निर्दयता

4. Hesitation — pause due to doubt

Hindi: झिझक

5. Admiration — deep respect or praise

Hindi: प्रशंसा

6. Relentless — continuing without stopping

Hindi: लगातार / निरंतर

7. Scarce — very limited; less in amount

Hindi: कमी

8. Endurance — ability to suffer patiently
Hindi: सहनशीलता
9. Discipline — controlled behavior; consistency
Hindi: अनुशासन
10. Persistence — continuing despite difficulty
Hindi: दृढ़ता / लगे रहना
11. Devastating — extremely painful or shocking
Hindi: बेहद पीड़ादायक
12. Resilience — ability to recover quickly
Hindi: विपरीत परिस्थिति से उबरने की क्षमता
13. Insecurity — lack of confidence
Hindi: असुरक्षा
14. Tremble — shake because of fear/emotion
Hindi: कांपना

15. Inclusion — bringing everyone in
Hindi: समावेशन
16. Inflation — rise in prices
Hindi: महँगाई
17. Casual — without much thought
Hindi: साधारण / लापरवाह
18. Extraordinary — very unusual
and impressive
Hindi: असाधारण
19. Inheritance — something
received from earlier generation
Hindi: विरासत
20. Authority — power or control
Hindi: अधिकार
21. Mockery — making fun of
someone
Hindi: उपहास
22. Pity — feeling sorrow for
someone
Hindi: दया

23. Reward — something given for effort

Hindi: पुरस्कार / फल

24. Strategic — planned carefully

Hindi: रणनीतिक

25. Witness — something that has seen an event

Hindi: गवाह

My favorites for exam use from this story:

stigma, relentless, resilience, persistence, devastating, strategic, scarcity, mockery.

