

JU PHYSICS GRADUATE BATTLES RARE DISORDER TO PURSUE RESEARCH GOALS

80% vision loss, but IIT Kanpur dream takes flight

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Calcutta: When 21-year-old Rohan Mukherjee left Calcutta for IIT Kanpur earlier this month, it marked more than the beginning of a new academic chapter.

The Jadavpur University physics honours graduate had overcome the challenge of losing nearly 80% of his vision to secure admission to the institute's integrated MSc-PhD programme in sustainable energy engineering.

Classes began on July 23, and Rohan is now living in the IIT Kanpur hostel.

Rohan has retinitis pigmentosa, a rare degenerative eye disease that gradually

leads to vision loss. An assessment at the LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad a few months ago found that he had lost about 80% of his eyesight.

"Will you be able to manage in Kanpur alone?" his mother, Nandita Mukherjee, asked after he secured admission.

"I have to move out of my comfort zone. I will manage," Rohan replied.

He cleared the Joint Admission Test for Masters (JAM), held in February, to earn a seat at IIT Kanpur. He has now moved to the campus on his own and begun the integrated MSc-PhD programme.

His arduous journey began when he was just two.

At Kindergarten, he could follow lessons in class, but his teacher noticed that he struggled to pick up a pencil or eraser if it fell from his desk.

"He kept losing things and couldn't find them. He was first diagnosed with myopia, with a power of -10 and -8. But despite wearing glasses, the problem persisted. We then took him to LV Prasad, where he was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa," his mother said.

Rohan initially studied at a mainstream school, where his mother said his Class II teacher would isolate him

because he "disturbed the class".

"He was made to sit outside the classroom or run around the field. If he couldn't follow the lesson, a child of that age would naturally disturb others. But there was no effort to understand him or his condition. Instead, he was isolated. He gradually developed an apathy towards studies," she said.

A turning point came when he joined the inclusive Bloomingdale Academy High School in Kalikapur.

Teachers provided personalised support, and even his question papers were customised to suit his needs.

Educators working with

children with special needs said such individualised attention helps create a level playing field. In many mainstream schools, however, teachers often struggle to provide such support because of limited awareness or large class sizes.

Rohan went on to score 92.3% in Madhyamik and 84% in Higher Secondary. He relied heavily on a laptop while preparing for exams, enlarging text and using its built-in text-to-speech feature. He now uses an app that converts text into speech.

There has been no looking back.

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Rohan Mukherjee