

Where It All Began: Jisha's Path from Student to Innovator

Leaving Kerala in my early twenties was one of the hardest decisions I ever made. For two whole decades, I had lived wrapped in the comfort and familiarity of home, and stepping out of that cocoon into an entirely new world felt overwhelming. I still remember my very first day at Lady Doak College - the hostel allotment, the need to converse mostly in English in an environment where Tamil flowed so freely, and the strangeness of everything that awaited me. That evening, I almost packed my bags to return home with my family. But somehow, I stayed.

The first few weeks were a blur of challenges - homesickness, new languages, unfamiliar faces, and the constant pressure of keeping up with the demanding classroom theories in Physics. Gradually, however, things began to shift. I made friends, picked up Tamil, learnt to follow the hostel rules, and began to understand more than just the curriculum. What unfolded was a whole new chapter in life, one filled with growth, resilience, and unforgettable memories.

From studying GPS systems and laser experiments to budgeting my monthly allowance, from crying quietly through the difficult moments to experiencing the sheer thrill of winning hostel competitions, I lived it all! I remember writing assignments on train journeys home, finding soul sisters in my classmates and hostel mates (many of whom remain close even today), and growing into myself-quietly, steadily, but surely. Looking back, those LDC days were more than an academic pursuit. They were life training in the truest sense, teaching me independence, joy, resilience, and the art of embracing the unknown.

What made LDC stand apart was the kind of academic freedom it offered-the encouragement to explore, to remain curious, and to dream bigger. We were not simply following a syllabus; we were engaging with the frontiers of technology and thought. I still remember the pride of getting hands-on experience in the GPS laboratory, which at that time felt revolutionary. The opportunities stretched beyond the campus, too. I travelled to other institutions, participated in competitions, and returned with prizes that filled me with pride. One moment etched deeply in my heart was representing our college at The Gandhigram Rural Institute - Deemed to be University, where I won first prize in a category that mattered greatly to me. The victory was sweet, but the real joy came from the pride and encouragement it brought along with it.

If I had to choose the most life-changing milestones during my LDC journey, two moments stand out. The first was when I was selected to do my M.Sc. project at CECRI (Central Electrochemical Research Institute, Karaikudi). The second was when I received the news that I had been selected to pursue my PhD in South Korea. Both moments transformed me, shaping my confidence, my vision, and the trajectory of my

future.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible support LDC provided. From scholarships that eased financial burdens to mentoring that pushed us to aim higher, from access to the latest technologies to special training sessions that widened our horizons, every bit of support made a difference. My project at CECRI, the chance to compete at various forums, and ultimately the scholarship that allowed me to pursue my studies in South Korea, each of these opportunities was born out of the encouragement and faith LDC invested in me.

Along the way, so many people saw potential in me before I saw it in myself. My classmates, for instance, would always insist I present in the first few slots during class seminars, a small gesture that significantly boosted my confidence for presentations later in life. Two of my hostel mates constantly nudged me to sing classical songs and join theme parades - encouragement that eventually gave me the courage to participate in singing competitions and theme events during my PhD years in South Korea.

And then there were the teachers. I can never forget the unwavering support and guidance of Prof. Nimma Elizabeth, Prof. Beulah J.M. Rajkumar and Prof. Joseline Danrita, from the Department of Physics. Nimma Ma'am guided me closely during my CECRI project and later helped me secure my PhD scholarship in South Korea. Over the years, our bond transformed. We even met twice in Delhi, and I can now call her a friend, though she was once the strictest in class! One of my fondest memories is of us laughing uncontrollably in a Delhi restaurant, reminiscing about those old days. I continue to stay connected with Beulah Ma'am through social media, while Danrita Ma'am and I exchange messages on WhatsApp. These bonds remain precious, not just because of what they taught me, but because of how they made me feel seen, supported, and cared for.

Looking back now, I can say with certainty that LDC didn't just educate me, it transformed me. It prepared me for life in every sense, opening doors to opportunities I had never imagined. That foundation carried me through my PhD in South Korea, into a faculty position at the University of Delhi, and today, into owning a firm in the energy sector.

This is why I believe, with all my heart, that more young women, especially those from underserved areas, should have the chance to experience what I did at LDC. In India, women's pursuit of education and careers is often weighed down by deeply rooted patriarchal expectations and household responsibilities. Traditional gender roles, though often dismissed as 'soft skills', demand immense time and energy, leaving women with little room to pursue studies or careers without going the extra mile - often at the cost of their own well-being. When these challenges are compounded by economic disparity,

access to opportunity feels almost impossible.

This is where LDC plays such a vital role. By supporting women from underserved and underprivileged backgrounds, the college does more than bridge a gap - it dismantles barriers, challenges systems of inequality, and creates pathways for women who have historically been left behind.

Leaving Kerala once felt like the hardest decision of my life. Today, I know it was the best decision I ever made. Within the walls of Lady Doak College, I found resilience, independence, friendships, mentors, and the courage to embrace the unknown. And in doing so, I discovered who I was truly meant to be.

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