

About the Author

Simon Saha is a Software Professional from New Delhi, India. He has been serving the Software Sector for eight years. Currently is working in Comverse as a Senior Software Development Engineer. He has worked with Indian software firms like Aricent, TSC and Ericsson India.

He is an occasional writer and writes some serious comedies to cheer up his friends. This is his first novel and his first complete analysis of an Indian Software Engineer.

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Preface

There is a marked difference between a ‘Software Engineer’ and an ‘Indian Software Engineer’. An Indian SE is one who can adjust to any recession condition and any salary figure. This super-human manages the software, the management and the client with one hand and impossible deadline with the other.

An Indian SE spends his office hours not only to develop the software. But his time is also spent in trying to develop the client’s and manager’s understanding on whatever is getting developed. In return he is rewarded for his ability to impress his masters ...and sometimes for his hard work too.

An Indian becomes a Software Engineer not because he is interested in the field (**yeah! those people are there too**). But his prime motive behind joining the field is because **there was nothing else to do** and **everybody does that**. If placed properly, this field also brings him money, prestige and a “good wife”.

When a SE arrives in the industry, he struggles to find space to apply his brains. However, he rarely gets the chance to do so because of his position, client’s misunderstanding and the presence of ‘**s marte r dudes**’ who always appear to be at a superior position. Those who can’t adjust to the environment drown in this ocean of ‘IT professionals’. Only those who learn the art of utilizing their position to their advantage, survive.

This story is about another such SE stuck deep in the Indian IT sector. In spite of challenges, the guy was clever enough to turn the opportunities in his favor. Instead of adjusting to the situations, he could change the situations themselves to his advantage. In this way he earned his promotion, on-site and also managed to get married in time.

Chapter 1 – Another ‘Samosa’ Day

“B-51, B52...I think it’s in the next lane”

And my father took a right turn increasing my blood pressure with it. From the picture, this girl looked thinner.... I mean less fat than the last one. The girl’s name was ‘Trisha’ and she was our second girl from the morning.

At the time of recession hit software industry, she could be my best option. Also, she might be kind enough to ignore my compensation compared to her heaviness. My salary and work life would have anyways made her thin after marriage.

We arrived at the house to be greeted by an uncle, an aunty and a big brother this time. The uncle had a mysterious smiling face. He was bulky, wore specs and had some hair still left on the corners of his mysterious head. The aunty was taller and thinner than her husband. She might have been good looking if only I could see through her TV serial makeup.

The big brother’s name was Abhishek. He was tall, thin and... oh no! He was a Software Engineer like me.

After a round of introductions, the aunty appeared from the kitchen with the usual tray of Samosas, Kachories and Mithais. Surprisingly, everything seemed cold and old. Might have been hot when the first boy come to see the girl this morning, I thought. It was yet another example of resource conservation in recession times. Or ...or...was it left from the Diwali that happened last weekend? Anyways, on repeated requesting.... I accepted their challenge and picked up a Samosa.

As soon as I opened my mouth to feel it, the Abhishek inquired,
“Is your job stable? I mean is your company doing fine?”

“Yes, of course, in fact it is doing quite well! I heard that job cuts are happening in other firms like ABC and DEF. But there are no such problems in my firm.” I had practiced this a lot many times.

“Really! In that case, can you please forward my resume in your company? You know, I was working in ABC and was taken out with the others in the free pool. I have three years of experience in Java and C++ and....”

O yes! So even before I saw the girl and agree to marry her, I had to place my would-be brother in law in my company. Last month, I was myself in a free pool and was about to lose my job when saved it, just in time, by discovering a new manager and managing his questions. The Samosas kept getting digested and Abhishek kept bothering me with his skill sets until finally, I saw her for the first time.

The lady looked nice and simple. Something was there in her... I mean of course there

was something in her... she was fat and healthy but not as ferocious as the last one. She was wearing a simple pink polka dotted Salwar-Kameez and had an innocent smile on her face. Her presence somehow increased my resistivity to hear the rest of her brother's tragedy.

"... To cut the costs, my company went through a restructuring and I was taken out..."
Abhishek was going on and on

The mysterious uncle suddenly sensed something and made a mysterious hand-lifting gesture. It was probably a code to **'shut up'** as Abhishek stopped his story on seeing it. Everything was quiet now, as if before a storm. I felt scared. She looked down and I immediately looked down.

The Samosa tray was looking empty at us. Was it my hunger? No! I think, it was Mr big brother's tragedy that made me gobble all the stale Samosas in one go.

Trisha smiled at me, "Would you like some more Samosas?"

"Nooo! They were enough." were the cries from my tummy.

Trisha seemed to love talking. Even before anyone asked her, she told us about the school where she teaches, her favorite dish, her favorite actor and her hobbies of singing, reading and cooking. She possessed a great attitude and charming nature. Apart from her, the uncle was mysteriously mysterious while the aunty appeared just as alive as her daughter. I had no problem opening up to them.

This visit was different from the morning girl's place. There I had to deal with tough questions regarding my package, expected increment and in-hand salary. The last uncle went emotional on my answers. They even asked my expenditures, for accommodating their daughter's monthly food budget. Surprisingly, no such questions were asked here. Probably, Abhishek knew about the packages in my firm. And, at least I had a salary while he had none.

Trisha and I were given some time to talk alone. The lady took me to her brother's room. The place looked very familiar. In fact, it was just like my own. There were similar printouts of specifications on the table. Some over read computer books lay on the racks. A rusty laptop bag rested on a chair. And then there was a familiar desktop used frequently but not dusted for ages. Among the other things were a small bed and little space walk around. So we sat on the bed.

The lady started first, "So Rohit, tell me about your hobbies."

Hobbies? My hobbies? Oh yes! I used to have some hobbies when I was a kid and then I became a Software Engineer. Now my hobbies were 'fixing bugs due to the bug fixing' and 'manager handling after the mishandling'. So I thought for a moment and gave her the usual hobby answer.

"Actually, I like reading, listening to music and watching movies."

“Really! You like reading. You know I just love books. What are your favorite books?”

I was in trouble. The last book I read was “Data Structures and Algorithm by Robert Lafore” which I used for interview preparations when I was about to lose my job. If I had announced the name of a famous book, she could have caught me with the content. So, diplomatically I said, “Me? Well, I like the books of Datstru Algom”

“Datstru what? Who is he? I never heard of him.”

“Datstru Algom! You haven’t heard of him? He is an upcoming Russian philosopher.”

“You know Russian?”

“No, I read his English adaptations. What a wonderful philosopher he is! He has come out with the algorithm of sorting the life’s primary data structures in a simplified and efficient manner with $\log(n)$ complexity”, what was I saying ?

“Hmm! So you have interest in philosophy. That’s strange, I thought that Software Engineers don’t like them.”

Suddenly, Trisha stopped talking. She looked outside from the window. The mysterious uncle had mysteriously walked past this room for a second time in two minutes. I understood that it was time to go back to the crowd.

As we went back, we found our parents in some serious discussions. Moms were discussing the next episode of “Kyonki bahu bhi kabhi saas banegi” while Papas were caught in dangerous talks about next generation hair styles. Finding them busy, the girl continued talking to me.

“I heard that you are searching for a non-software engineer wife. May I ask you why? You people have such an exciting life with computers and technologies. You make new software every day. I love teaching but my job isn’t as interesting as yours.”

She was just like everyone else. She thought our job to be innovative and exciting. In our country thousands become software engineers every year with the desire to innovate. But then working on projects with strict deadlines and some conservative process model, the management hardly gives them a chance to apply any creativity to it. With the largest number of SEs, even today we rely on the research happening abroad. Why? Because applying new ideas here would be too risky for our inflexible, service oriented, foreign fund dependent software industry.

Why did I want a non-software engineer in my life? Simply, because I wanted someone whose life was more exciting than mine. Someone, who was not running after software qualities and delivery deadlines. My wife could give me a different prospective about life. Also, she should be in a stable job, as our export oriented software sector becomes the first victim of any economic tragedy abroad.

I was lost in these thoughts so deep that I forgot to reply her. By that time, our parents had finished talking. Both the parties looked pleased. My father had taken the responsibility of matching our horoscopes and getting back to them. You see, people in India are open-minded now. They don't believe in castes and horoscopes, but they always need to match them for marriage.

Before leaving, I felt like saying something to Trisha. But as I soon as I opened my mouth, Abhishek appeared with his diary.

“Can you please tell me your e-mail id? I will forward you my resume.”

Chapter 2 – A different day at the office

The next day began early as I had several ‘Samosa’ attacks in my stomach reminding me of previous day experiences. At first I thought of skipping my office. But the stomach ache excuse had already taken two leaves for me that month. Also, I had a meeting with the client that day.

So after having the mandatory lectures from my mom, I caught the office bus at last moment. The bus was quiet and sleepy like every Monday. However, I felt something new that day. Whoever saw me appeared smiling and I was surprised to find everyone happy, that too, on a Monday morning. Did they come to know about my resignation plans?

Filled with curiosity, I asked my bus-mate Kunal

“Is there something wrong with my face today?”

“No man. It’s just that you look great today.”

That was strange. I was not wearing anything new. I didn’t have a haircut that month. And I had a morning stomach problem. Even that cute girl who sat with her odd boyfriend at the extreme corner gave me some appreciating looks. Things were so bad that even the ever quiet Manager who comes in my bus came to show me something important in the newspaper. It was not only with others but even I was feeling nice inside. Something had changed in my life.

Back at my office, an important teleconference with the client awaited me. And as usual, my manager, Mahesh was taking the lead to disgust the client and us alike.

A project manager is not the person who knows about the project. You see, such a person won’t be considered ‘**innovative**’ then. A project manager is actually the person who can make you do unimaginable things in manageable time with manageable salary and still get the credit of projecting. My manager ‘Mahesh’ was an excellent specimen to justify this definition.

“Yes Richard, we will do it in twenty days. No, don’t worry. It is a bit difficult but not impossible.”

“But Mahesh, how....?”, I was going to ask something

“Sssh! be quiet. We will discuss it later.” replied my Manager

“Yes, Richard. What? You will like it in ten days. Fine, we will deliver in ten days then. No, not a problem at all. We will put four people instead of two for the job.”

Things were going bad. It was as if due to time crunch nine women were being employed to produce a baby in one month. For managers, we were machines to deliver the code and not

engineers who design and develop the software. My manager Mahesh was even a step further as he would never negotiate for time, but only for money with our client.

“But Richard, early delivery will have some cost escalations as more resources will be deployed for this project”

As soon as he got over with the call, I asked him

“How is this possible Mahesh? How are we going to complete it in ten days?”

“O Rohit! You look very good today.”

“Mahesh! But...”

“I understand, see it is not that difficult. ‘We’ have to put little more effort. I know that you both can complete this work in ten days...”

“We both! But you just told Richard that four people will work on it.”

“That was for the client to hear. Don’t take that seriously. Two more people will fill the same charge number in timesheets for billing the client. You just ensure to complete the work on time.”

So that’s how our companies work. Even after cutting down our increments, employee benefits and paying us 1/10th of our counterparts in US, we still need to cheat our clients to earn the profit. Life was going to get tough, but I had other ways of handling it. Over the years I had learned to manage the manager’s management. And for those who don’t know, this is the first step towards climbing the ladder and becoming a manager yourself.

“That is alright, Mahesh. But there is another issue. For building module X, we need an understanding of module Y. This module was built by Keshav who has gone on leave for four days.” I knew that my manager would ‘**understand**’ this as he had little knowledge of the project. To tell you the truth, yes we did require the understanding of module Y. But that was not actually going to block our current activities.

“O! Is that so? Then we have a serious problem. I will have to inform Richard about this”

My manager quickly sat down to write a mail to Mr Richard. Would Mr Richard come to know about my mischief? Of course not, as he is also a ‘**manager**’. My next task was to convince my Team-lead. Today my energy levels were at a new high and I was prepared to use it to the fullest.

As I approached his desk, I found my Team-lead ‘Rajiv’ giving the same stale advices to a poor fresher who had no idea about the game. Giving such moral speeches was one of his greatest talents which got him his promotion and also the reason behind his numerous on-site trips and awards.

“I understand that you are relatively free. But that doesn't mean you can browse the internet. You are in a corporate world now. You have to be proactive. Look at me, in my free time I try to find new work. Do you remember the install script I created in my free time?”

“But Rajiv, that script is not working.”

“Exactly; now I use my free time to improve upon it. Don't expect people to give you work every time. You need to find work on your own. Do you remember how I suggested some code improvements to the client? The Client had accepted it. And now we are debugging the bugs due to those code improvements”

“Ahem! Sorry to disturb you Rajiv. But I need to discuss something.”

“Yes, Rohit, please go on.”

“We have to design module X in a **‘bandwidth’** of ten days but by **‘critical analysis’** we see a dependency **‘traceable’** to module Y. The complexity of module Y requires training by an expert on the subject.” This technique was necessary here as Rajiv was a fan of technical jargons. But did he understand what I was saying? Yes, he did as he is too on the path of becoming a **‘manager’**.

“Hmm... In that case we need to plan the training for module Y. This can happen only after Keshav comes back. Till then you can get on with the other activities”

So what do I do now? Don't worry guys, I also have a junior to delegate my tasks to.

When I arrived at my desk, I found the first mail from the lady herself. It was a short mail from Trisha with her brother's resume attached with it.

“Hi,

How are you doing? It was lovely meeting you yesterday. My father has given our horoscopes to the pundit.

I am attaching the resume of my brother. Please forward it in your company.

Thanks
Trisha”

Well! Well! Now that Abhishek had sensed my boredom towards his career, he was using his lovely sister to forward his resume. But I dislike women who get in touch with the guys only for their needs. Her first mail could have been more special. Anyways, as the tradition goes, I had to write a reply.

Before sending it to HR, I had a look at the resume myself. As I read it, I understood the

risks of forwarding it in my company. Neither the guy had good education nor did he have outstanding career. But he surely wanted a great pay as was evident from his choice of expected salary. I thought for a moment and decided against forwarding it to the HR. Instead, I just wrote back just for her satisfaction.

“Hi,

It's nice to hear from you. I am doing fine. We had a nice time yesterday.

I have forwarded Abhishek's resume to the HR. Let's hope that he gets the call.

Cheers!!
Rohit”

In spite of the shortcomings, her mail had some positive effects on me. I was in a cheerful mood for the rest of the day.

Was it love? No it couldn't be. How could I fall in love so soon?

Chapter 3 –A Silly Mistake

The next morning I found two fresh beauties in my bus. The girls I knew in the bus were also looking lovely. This was scary. It is said that when you fall in love with a girl, all the other girls in the world look beautiful to you.

You would ask me why? It is because, you see, you won't get them when you are in love with her. Tell me guys, how many men find their partners beautiful and other girls not so much? It was not their beauty but the reason behind them looking so beautiful to me that had caught me in the fear of **'falling in love'**.

I had already started thinking about her. Her pretty smile was disturbing me the whole day. I was caught off-focused by my friends while discussing a cricket match during lunch time. And somehow, I was not in the mood to work that day.

Just about an hour before the day's closing, I got the response from Trisha. A mail from her had been the wish from my heart the whole day. I quickly opened to read it. It was a happy response from her. Her brother Abhishek had got a call from my company and he was going to be interviewed the next day.

Hay! Wait a minute. How can it be? I didn't forward his disastrous resume. Have the HRs gone mad? At this time of recession, when so many SEs are ready to work for half a penny, what made them to call him? Anyways, it shouldn't bother me as the change will be minuscule if a new idiot is added to the lot. I should just enjoy her politer gestures for the misunderstanding.

I sat down to write a detailed response to her mail. It took me a while. And when I finished writing it, I realized that my office bus had left me. Love was surely affecting my schedule. And now, I had no choice but to catch the late night office cab.

And then I saw that my neighbor Satish was staring curiously at me.

"Is something bothering you Satish?"

"Nothing, actually I was surprised to find that you staying late today?"

"I had to stay back. I had some deadlines to meet"

"It's good to see you work so hard"

Yes guys! My dedication to work was commendable that day as I was staying back. In India, hard work is not as important as appearing to be working hard. Satish is an excellent specimen to prove this fact.

He was a bachelor, staying away from his small town in a cheap rented accommodation

here. As his family was not here, he usually stayed back after office hours to enjoy the free office internet, free desktop, free dinner and free night cab. He ensured completing even the minutest of tasks given to him and completing it in a tough manner by staying late.

In return he was praised for his hard work, dedication and passion for work. He had won several awards and good ratings from our manager. And according to latest rumors, he was also going to be promoted in the near future.

As if that were not enough, the guy would also occasionally take long vacations of a week or more from my manager. The reason was simple; he was staying ‘**miles**’ away from his family. As for me, I never could get a week long leave as I stayed in the city itself? My manager simply could not understand why I would require a week of vacation. In short my home location defined my leave period.

These thoughts, didn’t allow me to notice that Team Lead Rajiv had come to my desk. But of course he was staying late as he had also ‘**worked hard**’ to be my Team Lead.

“Hi Rohit! Good that I found you at this time. I urgently need a favor from you”

“From me? Yes Rajiv, what can I do for you?”

“Actually, you see, I am going on leave for a week. Can you please take over my part till I am back?”

I had to take over his part but what part? This was confusing. As far I knew, Rajiv never had any part as he was the Team Lead. He would only give work to others and inquire about their status. Rajiv never had anything else to do except probably offering some boring Team advices.

“I can’t understand it Rajiv. Can you please explain me what do I have to do?”

“You just have to take over my part. Alright, let me clarify. You remember the tasks that were given to me and I delegated it to you and the new guy. The ones which our manager Mahesh had asked me to complete.”

“Ok, I got it. But I thought that it was our team task.”

“Don’t bother about that. It doesn’t matter whether you do it or I do it. Just ensures to get it done and tell Mahesh that ‘**we**’ have done it. Also, you need to take some interviews tomorrow. We have to recruit a new guy in our team. Here are the resumes of the candidates.”

“I have to interview them. Sure Rajiv, I will take the interviews.”

I quickly accepted his part as the joy of not seeing him around was too overwhelming. Also, I was happy to be taking interviews. Interviews had always been an entertaining experience for me. Besides giving the respite from your work, interviews can actually make you feel worthy

in your company. Interviews also make you remember some of your college education that was long forgotten in maintenance projects.

As I glanced through the resumes of candidates, I found that the one of Mr Big Brother, Abhishek.

“Oh Shit! What have I done?”

Chapter 4 –The Interview

Never before had I experienced an interview candidate giving jitters to the interviewer. What could I do now? Knowing Abhishek's competence, it would have been impossible to take him in my team. Even if I let him in, the blame would fall on me. Or worse! It could affect my own appraisal.

What if I didn't take him in? Then wouldn't he kill my love-story even before it got a life?

No, he won't. I had a plan to bell the cat without being bitten. My mission was to prove the job to be too skillful for Abhishek. I would ask him some **specialized** technical questions and get him rejected. That way, he would still consider me as a great SE working in great a firm. I would still be an absolute worthy candidate for his sister.

As soon as the idea struck me, I sat down to prepare for it. The interview preparation for Abhishek kept me awake till two that night. I had never studied so much for my own interviews. Still unsatisfied with my preparation, I took the printout of entire BreakTheInterview.com for my reference.

Excitement and anxiety had brought me to the office early the next day. I quickly ran through my emails till my partner arrived. We two were the interview panelist of the day. My partner was a female, Miss Priya from my boss's likable list.

Priya was an extremely ambitious woman. As far I could analyze the lady, her ambitions were to become a housewife as soon as her boyfriend declares a long term on-site abroad. For this she was very dedicated and hardworking over her cell phone throughout the office hours. Carrying her pink mobile, she had made herself acquainted with every corner of our office.

Priya was also very passionate about her work. Presentation of the code and repositories were her main concern. Many a times, she would write six lines of comment for a single line code change so that everyone can appreciate it.

My manager, Mahesh was extremely fond of the lady as she was always going '**extra mile**' and taking '**special effort**'. So important was this in his eyes that her lack of normal efforts was occasionally overlooked.

"The candidates have arrived. Shall we start?" asked Priya

"Yes Priya, let's go. Is that your new suit? It looks so wonderful on you."

"Thanks Rohit, I am glad that you noticed. I thought that the candidates should find me in good shape." she laughed giving her typical blush.

Confident of clearing interviews taken by interview candidates when we interview them, we went to meet our first candidate of the day. The guy was a tall and thin fellow. He possessed a French beard and had an overly smart attitude.

“Hmm! In your two and a half years of experience, you didn’t stay longer than six months in any firm. May I know the reason for such frequent switches?”

“It passion! I am very passionate about the work I do. When I don’t get good work I switch my job. I want to join this company as I expect to get the right kind work here.”

“And what is the right kind of work for you? I mean, why do you feel that your current responsibilities are not so good for you?”

“Let me explain you Rohit. You see! I have an ambition of going into the ‘**field of management**’. My ambition is to become a project manager one day. Already, I am working at various levels of management within my team.”

Another of those management victims, I thought. In our country everyone is a manger or wants to be one. It doesn’t matter whether there is anything or anyone to manage or not. With just two and half years of experience the guy wanted to become a manager. Every year thousands of management institute blossom around our country and millions of SEs dive in to become some Manager.

“Well! I understand your ambitions Aniket. But we are looking for a candidate with good technical expertise and not a guy with great management skills.”

“But that is exactly what I am here for. Actually, I have developed good management skills for **managing my technical expertise**”

As the day progressed, unfortunately, we could select only those candidates who could understand our questions and reply to them correctly. Rest all had to be rejected due to their lack of knowledge or having the one that we didn’t require.

My heart pounded with the entry of each candidate. I was waiting for Abhishek. I wanted to get over with him as quickly as possible. My wishes came true only after the fourth candidate as I found Abhishek standing at our door.

“Good Morning! Hi Rohit! How are you?”

“Do you people know each other?” asked the lady

“Yes, we just happened to meet once.”

Just at that moment, Priya’s mobile rang again.

“Hi Dear!! You know what? I am taking interviews today. Yes, and I, just hold on.Z”

(Whispering in my ears) ‘Continue with this candidate till I am back’

And so, Priya went out with her cell phone leaving Abhishek at my mercy or was the other way round?

“You know, my sister keeps talking about you. She says that you are a very nice and a charming person”

“That’s great Abhishek. Shall we get on with some questions now?”

“Sure Rohit! Just one more thing. My job is very important for her marriage preparations.”

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