

I met god at Mumbai marathon.

At times during the marathon, I did think about how I was going to write about the experience (between thoughts of, "I regret signing up for this" and "oh my god – I wonder when I'll get full use of my legs back").

From a zero running experience an year back, to participating (& successfully completing) one of the top 10 marathons in the world - has been a life changing experience for me. With an experience of 4 half marathons & one 10Km event in the past one year, I felt confident that I can handle 'the Beast' - full marathon of 42kms (42.195 to be exact).

15th Jan Sunday, Mumbai. I was incredibly nervous. It was MARATHON day! I didn't sleep very well and had been up since 2:30am. Was I ready? Could I really do this?

Had breakfast of eggs, Toast, Banana & lots of water. Walked about 1.5 km to the Azad Maidan, the assembly area for the Full Marathon runners. Exactly at 5.40 am the marathon started from the iconic C.S.T (Chhatrapati shivaji terminus).

So here is my account of the five hour journey. I have tried to detail what was happening to me physically & psychologically. So now rest & enjoy the journey with me. (*Refer the route map at the end of this article to get fair idea of the distances & location*).

I joined 5.30 'Bus' lead by a wonderful guy Tanvir kazmi. The 'Bus' is a group of runners like me who are led by a highly experienced runner. This 'Bus' was scheduled to reach the finish point in 5hrs & 30 minutes. I was simply amazed the way he had planned the entire route. He had pasted a chart on his bib indicating time we will take to reach virtually every kilometre of the route.

0-30 mins Body heat rises

Even before the race started, my heart rate had gone up due to adrenaline and the excitement. It is perfectly normal and helps to get the body prepared for the challenge. My resting pulse is 40 & I guess it was fast rising.

As we covered about 5kms, many runners had now dispersed. Some of them had already gone far ahead & we were left about 40 runners in the bus. My body was now getting warmed up. There was not much crowd on the roads yet.

It was still dark & bit cold.

30mins to 1 hr (8 Km) Mild dehydration

Now, I was jogging along comfortably.

Taking short walking stops along with the 'Bus' at every drinking station, which were about 2-3 kms apart. My heart rate was steady about 70 beats per minute. The body

was relying more on carbohydrate fuel, in the form of glycogen manufactured by the liver.

1 to 2.30 hrs (~ 21km) Burning fat

The body now started to burn fat to power the muscles. The efficiency of this depends on the fitness of the runner. Stores of glycogen are running low.

My heart rate crept up and the body temperature was rising.

I was running at about 70 per cent maximum effort and keeping some in reserve.

I made sure to take regular water & sports drinks to stop becoming dangerously dehydrated.

At the start of the sea link bridge had a pleasant shock- a group of Mumbai policemen were giving us red Roses. Now the crowd was slowly building up alongside the road. The kids as usual were marvellous, cheering us. On the opposite of the road we met a large group of half marathon runners. Both of us got excited & started cheering each other. Wow what a wonderful experience it was. We were all charged up! We were running a Marathon.

As we entered the sea link bridge, felt somewhat strange, there was not a single vehicle on either side of the road. We were kings of the road. On our right side saw sun rising, it was such a beautiful scene. I was still pretty calm & running at a controlled pace.

I had secretly decided, if I reach half the distance (21km) in 2hrs 40 min & still feel comfortable, I would attempt to finish full marathon in 5 hours. We exited the sea link bridge & turned right towards Mahim causeway. At about 21 km mark checked my stop watch & saw its 2hrs 32min. I was 8 minutes ahead my target time. Asked our pacer guide at what point I should start accelerating, if I had to target 5 hr finish. He suggested, start immediately by slowly increasing the pace.

I then decided to attack the road & slowly started increasing the distance between myself & the 5.30 bus.

Crowds were gathering on both sides of the road, felt as if the city has woken up to witness my attempt to finish in 5 hours. At this point I started to feel the heat. I grabbed water & sports drink at every drink station. Surprisingly all my body parts & joints were still functioning perfectly. No pain or cramps yet!

Now the battle between body & mind started to develop. After 25 kms it's how strong your will power is. Whether you can muster enough courage & keep on relentlessly pushing your body to do the impossible. It is said that on the edge of pain boys are separated from men.

Slowly I could feel my body crying for relief. My body was trying to control my mind but still not in a dangerous situation.

2.30 to 4 hrs (~ 32 kms) Lactic acid build-up & hitting the "Wall".

This is the point when many runners realise they cannot go any further. The body's glycogen stores are now exhausted and the muscles must rely on the breakdown of fat.

People who have not trained properly can start to go into anaerobic respiration, when there is too little oxygen reaching the muscles. One of the by-products of anaerobic respiration is lactic acid, which causes pain and muscular cramps. Lactic acid also makes it more difficult for the body to break down fat, so a runner slows right down.

At the end of this period, many runners hit the so-called "The Wall".

This is a psychological and physiological barrier when you feel that you cannot go another step. Glycogen levels have bottomed out so blood sugar levels are very low. Blood sugar is also needed as fuel for the brain, so one feels faint and woozy. Some competitors are mentally exhausted, or even just bored.

Lactic acid levels are high and the levels of important salts in the body, known as electrolytes, which include sodium and potassium chloride, go very low.

The joints, particularly the knee caps, will be sore because they are under an enormous amount of stress as the legs pound the hard road surface.

As I crossed the 32 km mark started feeling the exhaustion.

There were now even more people lining the course at certain spots. Some were still yelling and clapping, "You're looking good!" Okay, I know they were lying. I must look like hell. I passed by a glass shop, looked into the mirror & saw a large red tomato looking back at me! Probably they're cheering because they're grateful *they* didn't decide to run a marathon. Some of them must be wondering why anyone would do this voluntarily. They must know we hadn't; we all committed heinous crimes & this is our punishment!

As we approached the Peddar road gentle ascent, I decided to walk. My calf muscles were now in pain. Fortunately, I did not have any cramps yet. As we were walking, a group of girls handed us chocolate bars, wow it was really such a beautiful feeling. All along there was lot of cheering & encouragement making us feel great. At one point a group of old ladies were handing us bananas & oranges. Such a kind gesture by complete strangers made me very emotional. We were being treated like kings!

On I went km after km. religiously stopping at every drinking station, grabbing water & sports drink. I felt I need to engage my mind into something constructive...started counting my steps..1...2.....3..... I went till 25.....then again...1...2.....3...

Started having dry throat, I was all wet with sweat, felt that I must have lost at least a kg of weight. Sun was ruthless; felt like I was in a microwave oven. I started having hallucinations. My whole life was zipping before my eyes, was I dying? Energy level was dangerously low.

I was still able to do some simple math, so I could continuously calculate the kilometres of woe ahead. More complex math like figuring out my pace was now impossible. At the 38km mark it was hard to fathom just 4 more kms. I should be celebrating, "Only four more kms!" and start a happy dance, if only in my mind. But the hell continued and I was very certain this was simply not worth it. I should stop. "Never again!" I would take a few more steps and, "Never again!" I guess I should just keep walking, but why should walking be this painful? The race was now a nightmare! Maybe if I could just wake myself up...

Then suddenly I saw human like figure, with two glasses of water, shouting at me ...'come on...come on....'its just few kms to go'. I felt, this is my end & I am meeting the almighty.....god. I couldn't see his face.....it was too hazy for my eyes. I grabbed 2 cups of water, one I drank & other emptied on my hot head & burning face..... felt fresh.....bit cool..... started running again. But then I stopped turned around & saw the God, he was an old man smiling, shouting & encouraging me not to stopI started running again.

4 to 5 hrs (~ 40km) Exhaustion point

My body was now reaching exhaustion point and my pace was drastically reduced. Was feeling dehydrated, which thickens the blood and slows down the circulatory system. This means that the heart is working even harder to push the sluggish blood around the body.

Why the hell am I doing this? I am on a wrong planet! Have I gone mad? Then I cursed myself & took a vow, never.....ever to run a marathon. I saw the rising sun & he was laughing at me. My family....friends...were probably right; I was a lunatic. I was cursing myself at each step I took. I repeated the vow 'never ever to run a marathon again'.

As I entered Churchgate, there was lot of cheering, encouragement & support of the mumbaikars. Felt as if whole Mumbai had come to cheer me! Now I cannot stop, I can't let them down.

5+ hours (the last 2 km) Dangerous heart rate

My heart rate must have soared to near maximum of 180 beats a minute and the blood pressure must have gone through the roof. The core body temperature had gone dangerously high.

There is a very thin line between the bravery of continuing and the pure stupidity of it. Not since wondering about it: I passed that thin line many kms back...

I..... JUST..... WON'T..... QUIT!

I had decided even if I have to crawl, I would still finish the race.

I was experiencing how, human body can be so delicate & strong at the same time!
How it can be made to do seemingly impossible things just by a strong will power.

Before me came the last 300 mtr mark and I can't even begin to describe what a beautiful sight it was. Suddenly I wasn't tired. After the slight left turn at about 200 mtr mark, I could see the finish line with digital time clock of 10:45 a.m with some odd seconds. With unbelievable number of spectators suddenly watching, I dug deep and mustered every last bit of remaining strength I had,

I SAID, I WILL NOT WALK ACROSS THE FINISH LINE, I WILL RUN.

.....and started to jog and vowed to continue until I crossed the finish line. After reaching 100 mtr mark something happened to me.

I threw away the water bottle & started sprinting towards the finish line! Crowds must be shocked, thinking who is this madman sprinting, after running for 42 kms. Yes at this stage, I was completely out of mind. It was my mind ordering my body to sprint across. It had become an out of body experience.

As I crossed..... no..... sprinted across the finish line.....my heart beat had shot up to its maximum in my entire life. I almost crashed into the next runner. He turned around, smiled & said "welcome to the Marathon club".

Now I had become a true marathon runner!!! OH MY GOD WHAT A FEELING.....

I was on road for the past nearly 5 hrs, with no interval, lunch break or tea break! It was five hours of Sheer excitement, Fun, Pain, Anger, Agony, Frustration, Lot of swearing & cursing, Relief & Finally a divine peace!

I experienced the pain of joy or was it a joyful pain?

At the full Marathon runners stall, a volunteer garlanded me with a finisher medal & gave me the refreshment pack. I then walked around like an emperor having just conquered a continent! saw there were already many such emperors! Each one of us had conquered our own Mount Everest.

I had a lump in my throat, tears were gathering in my eyes, & I couldn't hold them back any further. I let them flow freely; dissolving the vow I had taken, never to run a marathon again.

& then had a sudden rush of adrenaline & endorphins, got a 'runners high' & said to myself; now instead of going by Car, I am now going to run all the way back to Pune, my home town, about 180 kms away! Better sense prevailed before I took any further step!

That's the magic & that's beauty I experienced running a Marathon! It was truly a holy experience!

Now even after 2 days am still in pain, in places I could never imagine (*don't ask which place*).....



Now no running for at least a month.....

Not even looking at my running shoes.....

.....just swimming.....

.....& planning for the next marathon...!!!!!!

Oh & my timing for this full marathon is 5hrs:6min:57secs.

Why I thought of running a full marathon?

A casual comment in December 2010, by a close friend, challenging me to complete a full marathon triggered the process.

Being an Industrial Marketing Consultant, (www.inmas.com) I approached this challenge as a market research assignment on myself! In the past 13 months I read about & spoke to a number of Marathon & other distance runners about nutrition, running programs, and rest - sleeping patterns. Then came to a conclusion - I can certainly run & complete a full marathon in 6 hours. With a nearly two decades of swimming & water-polo, I was reasonably fit & had all the joints working properly!

As a part of the preparation, I participated & successfully completed 4 half marathons (2 in Pune, one each in Delhi & Goa) apart from one 10 km event in Bangalore.

Sanjay Limaye.

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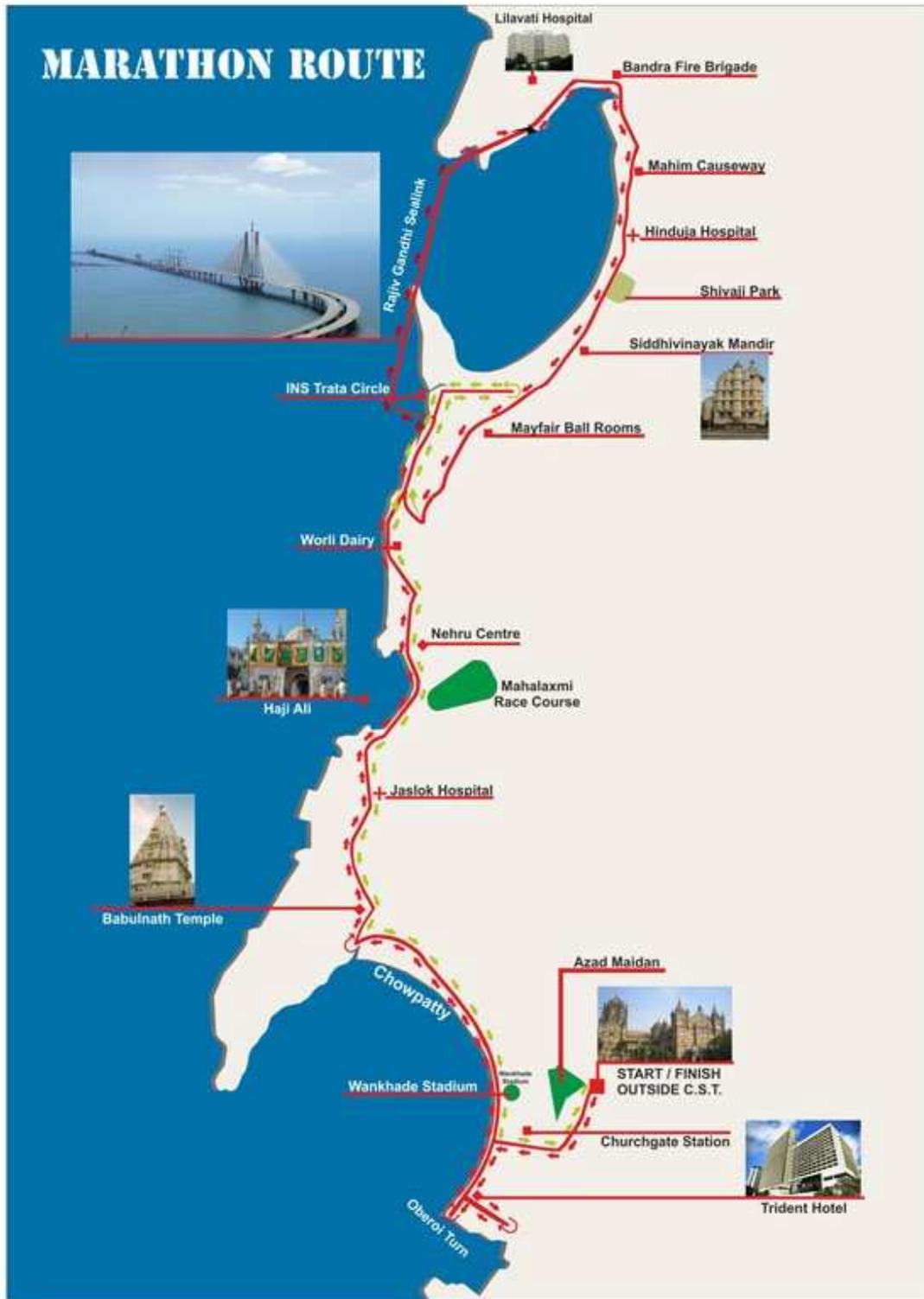
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If you have enjoyed, this experience, please feel free to forward this journey to your friends & relatives.

Read further for:

1. The Marathon route &
2. Finisher certificate.

Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon.
Sunday.15th January 2012.



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Standard Chartered MUMBAI 2012 MARATHON

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