

राजा

RAJA



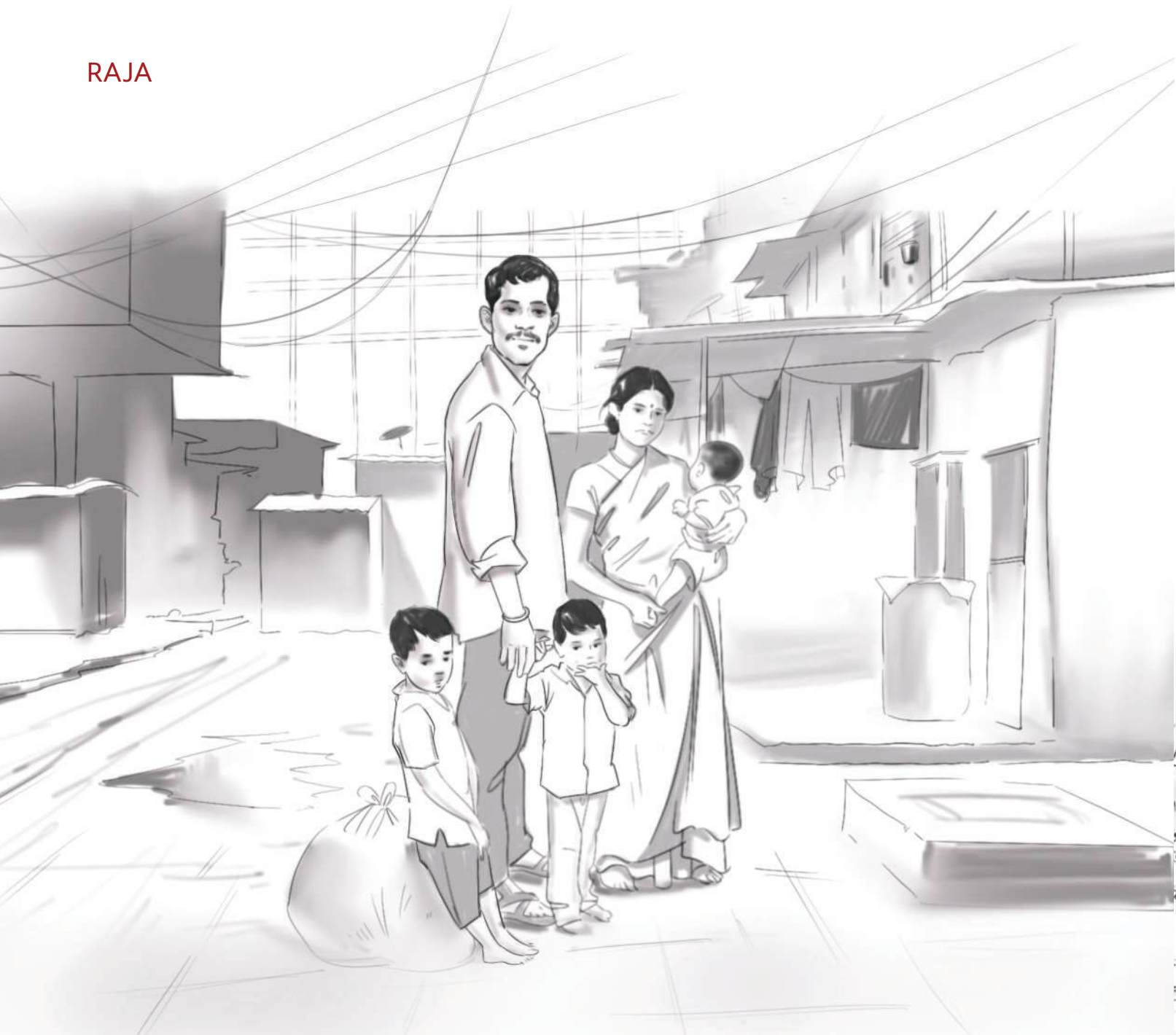


A name can hold much promise or spell out a Greek Tragedy.

Raja in Sanskrit means a 'King'.

A king is a title with authority, ambition, and an unwavering hunger to broaden one's territory. Hence a 'King' seems to be an ironic name for a boy who was born into social housing in a city of more than 20 million inhabitants - Mumbai. Here housing is stretched, multiple families share one-room slum tenements with common toilets that are homes to the working class in the city.

Yet, here we encounter a different kind of Raja, one who does not sit upon a throne, but instead, walks the humble path of a caddy, silently navigating the lush greens of the golf course for minimum wages.



Raja was born in the slums of Colaba that border the Indian Naval Base - Navy Nagar. At the south end on the archipelago of the island are the verdant greens of a golf course called the United Services Club. As a young boy, Raja would watch golfers swinging away at the driving range, aspiring to lower their handicap. Peering through the gates, he grew an interest for golf and dreamed of one day being able to play the sport.

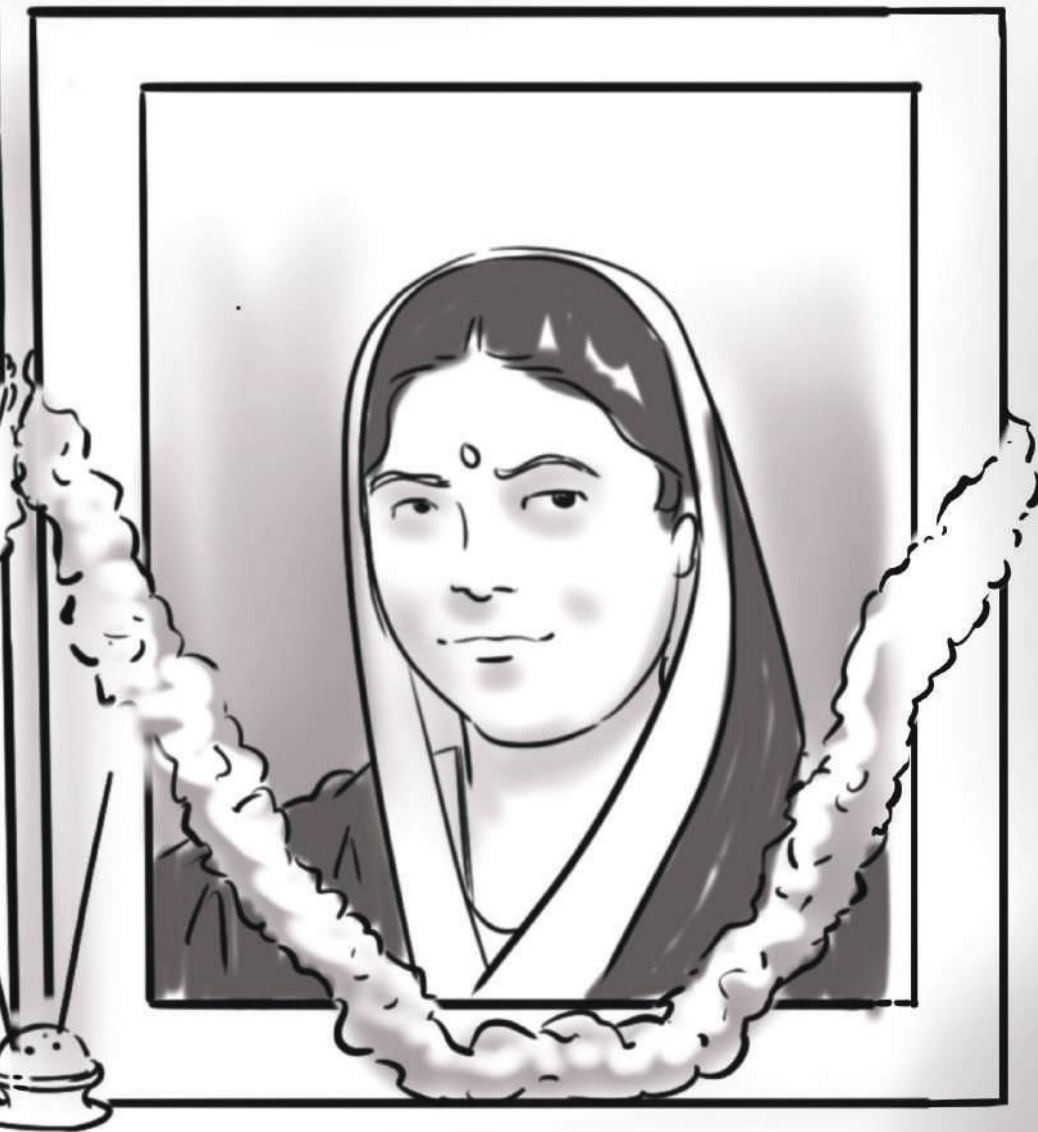
He had a subsidized education at the Kendra Vidyalaya run by the Armed Forces. After school he would sneak into the golf course with his friends and simply enjoyed watching the members play. He gradually climbed the ranks and became a caddy.

For the ones who are unfamiliar with the golfing lingo, a caddy is a golfer's best friend. They accompany the player by carrying their bag on their backs through the undulated golf course, assisting them with their golf club choice and the direction of which they should hit in. In a population of over 1.4 billion, a caddy is seen as a working class service staff who receives wages below minimum.

Our story will dive into the complexities of being a caddy in India and the exponential growth of a talented caddy as he breaks barriers by becoming a coach.







Life got extremely tough for Raja at an early age. He unfortunately lost his parents at the age of 12. Being the eldest child in his household, he had to take on the responsibilities of his younger siblings.

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To make ends meet, Raja did odd jobs like washing cars and delivering newspapers. The family moved to a smaller place, facing tough times.

But Raja did not give up.





He even got a job at the ABN Amro bank
as an efficient office boy.





Soon after, love entered his life in the form of Shuba.



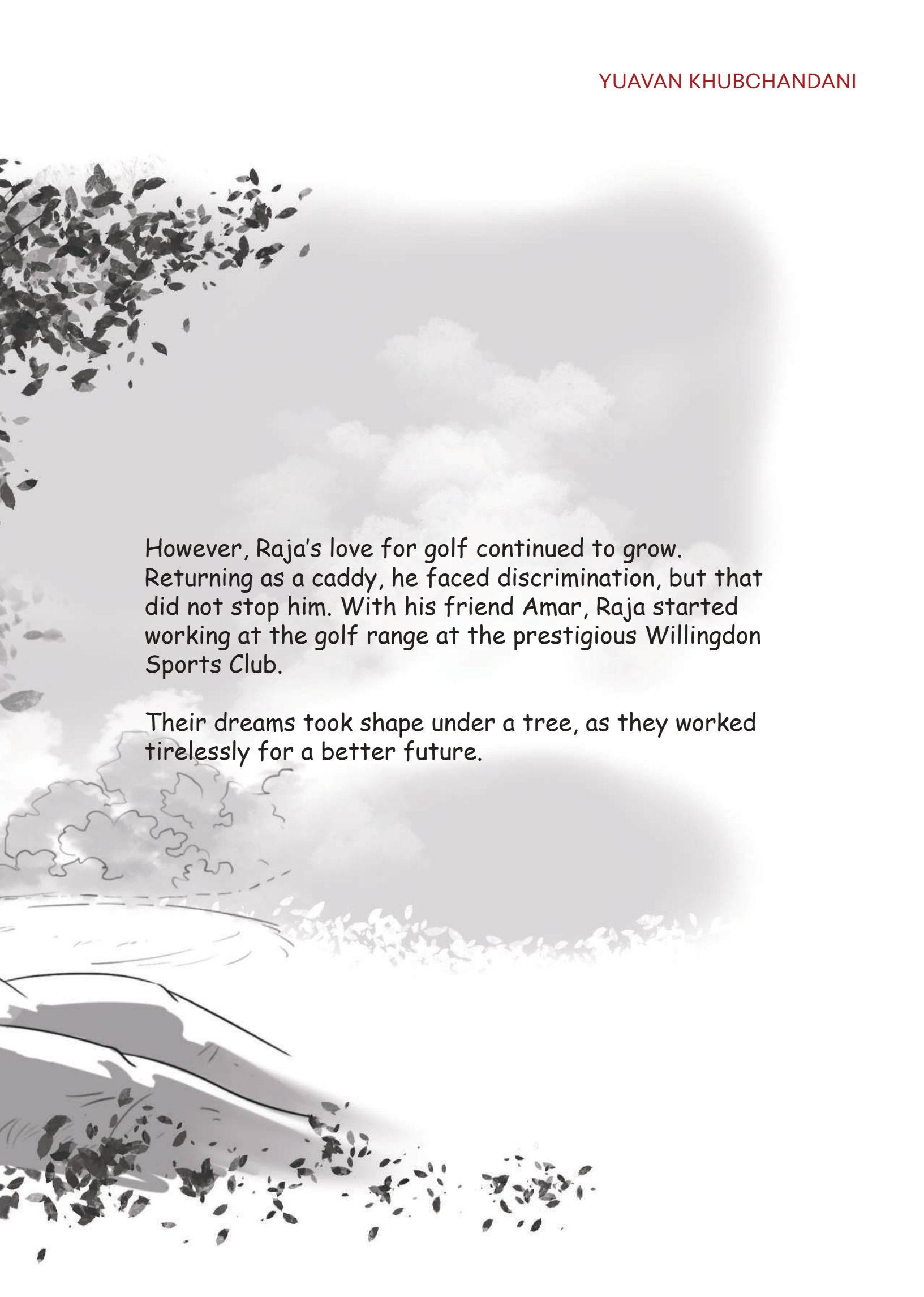


Their journey together highlighted the importance of sticking together in tough times.



The young couple was soon blessed with a daughter, Jeevika, who now studies in the prestigious Fort Convent school in Mumbai.



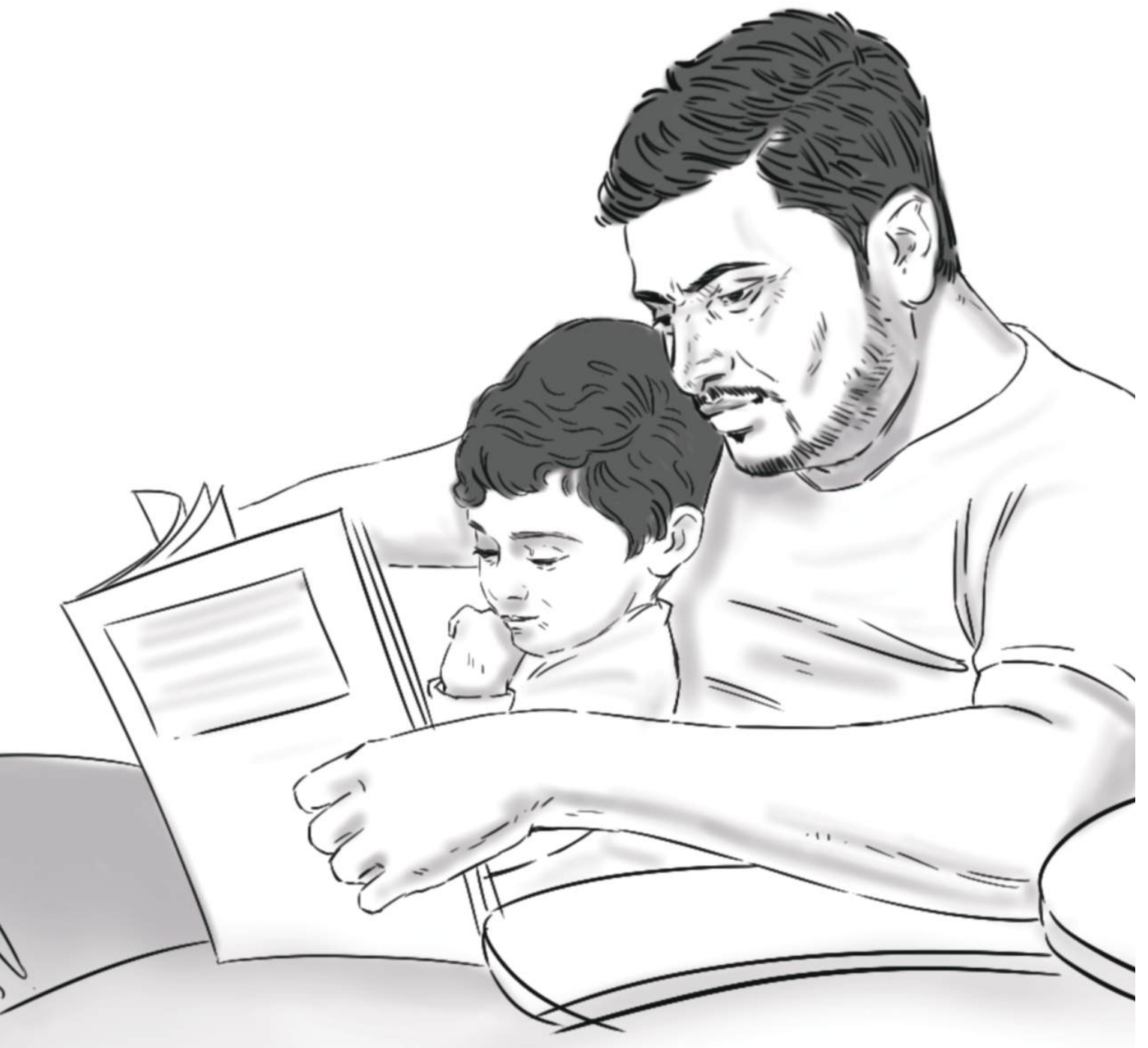


However, Raja's love for golf continued to grow. Returning as a caddy, he faced discrimination, but that did not stop him. With his friend Amar, Raja started working at the golf range at the prestigious Willingdon Sports Club.

Their dreams took shape under a tree, as they worked tirelessly for a better future.

Raja devoted the first years of his fatherhood towards kickstarting the driving range. As his family grew with the arrival of his son Rudra, Raja juggled being a dad and his unending love for golf.







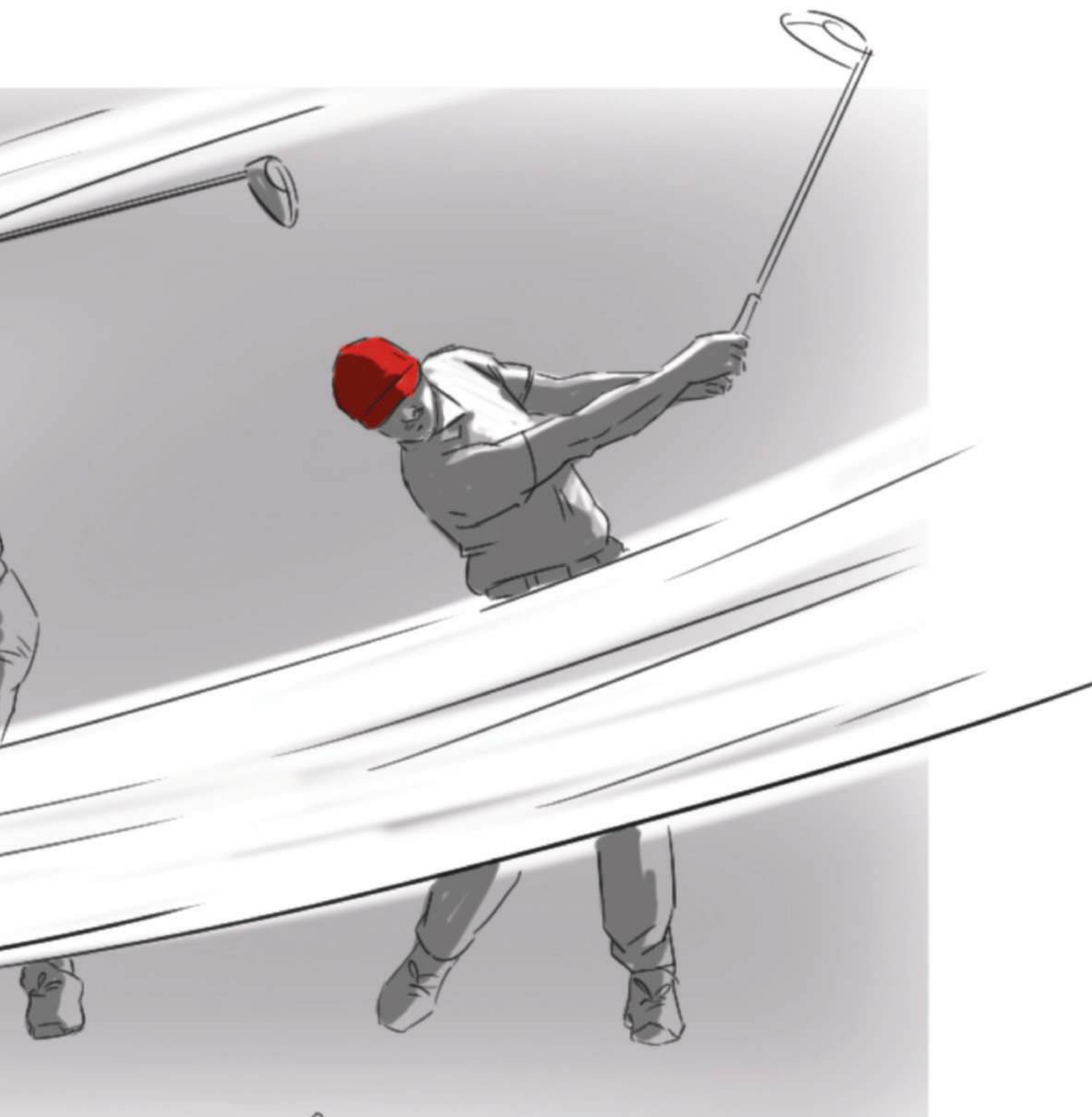
After exploring several fields of expertise, Raja came to believe that his future was on the golf course, caddying for aspiring golfers. Golf being his forte, he dreamt of becoming a coach, giving him access to a wider horizon and a better quality life for his family.



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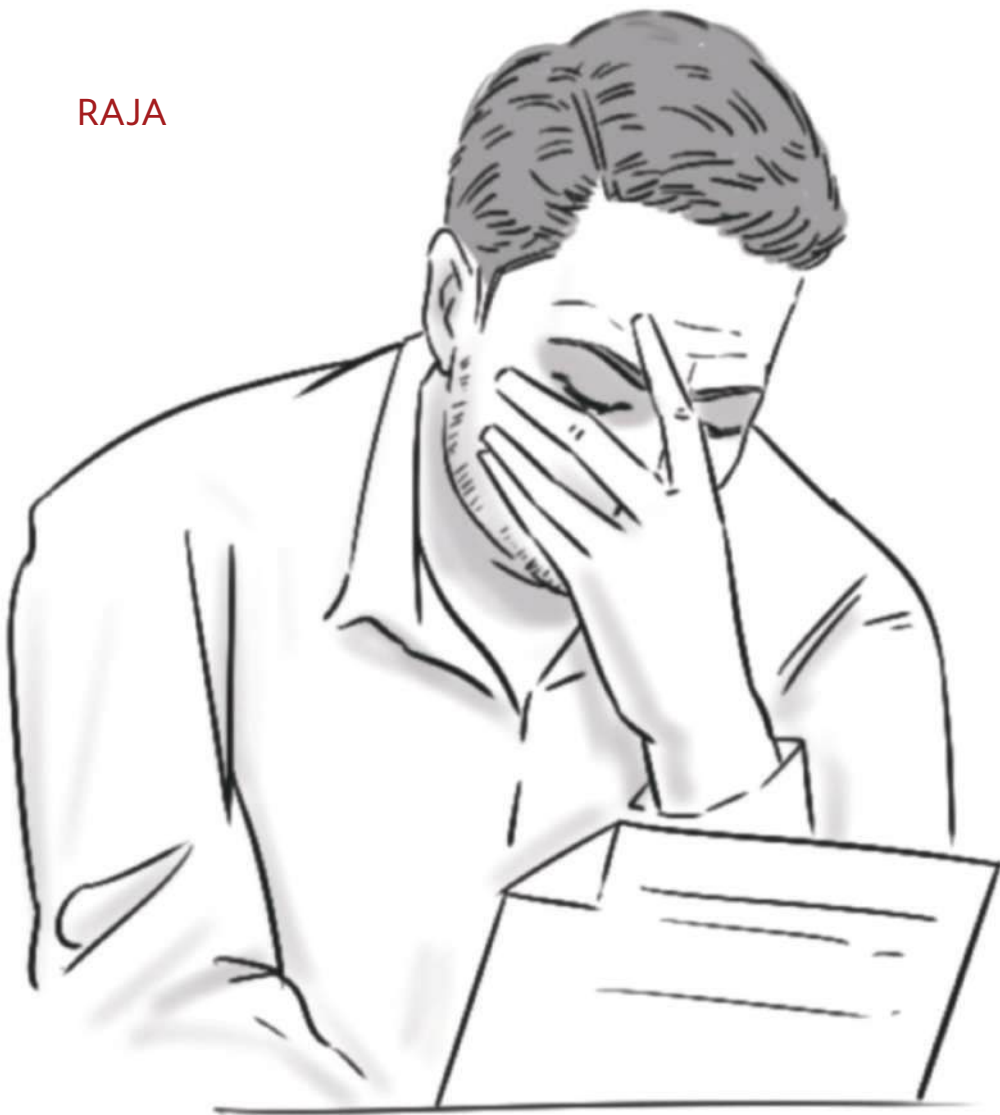
Every swing of the golf club represented Raja's determination...



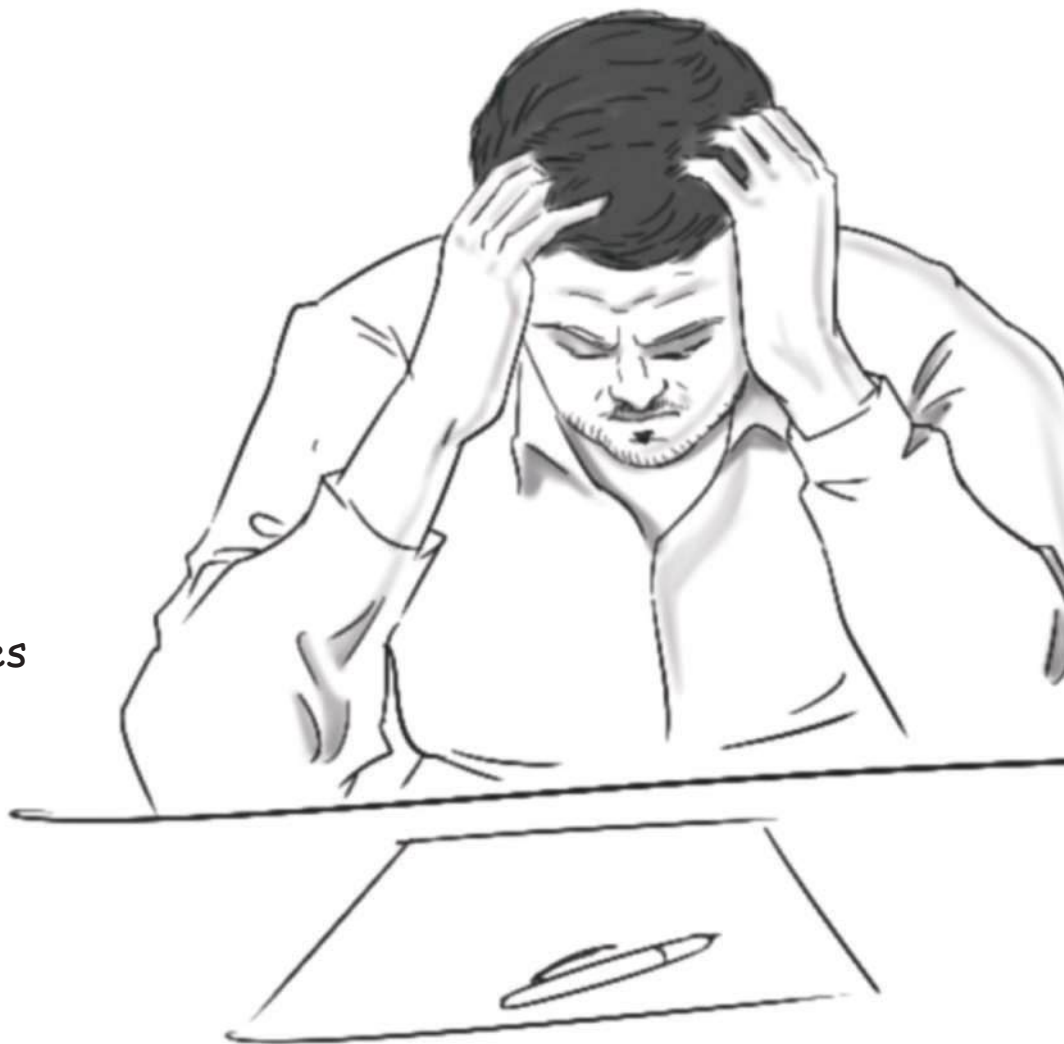


...facing discrimination along with other caddies at
The Willingdon Sports Club.

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Raja's late-night studies showed his ambition to become a coach.



Taking care of his family, including an alcoholic brother-in-law and mother-in-law facing health issues, became a part of his routine.

To become a coach under the National Golf Academy Of India, an individual must pass two examinations. The Playing Ability Test (PAT) and the written exam which deals with the technical and intricate aspects of the sport. Becoming a coach was tough. Raja failed the coach exam many times, facing disappointment...



... but he never give up
inspite of the challenges.






Studying harder and working on his golf game, Raja passed the Category C Coach examination, bringing immense joy. The journey was not over. The Professional Ability Test (PAT) posed a challenge. Failure marked several attempts, but Raja persisted.



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In a moment of triumph, he passed the PAT, breaking free from the discrimination that had held him back for so long. The coach card, after multiple pleas and illegal threats, was finally issued to Raja a year and a half later after completing the PAT...

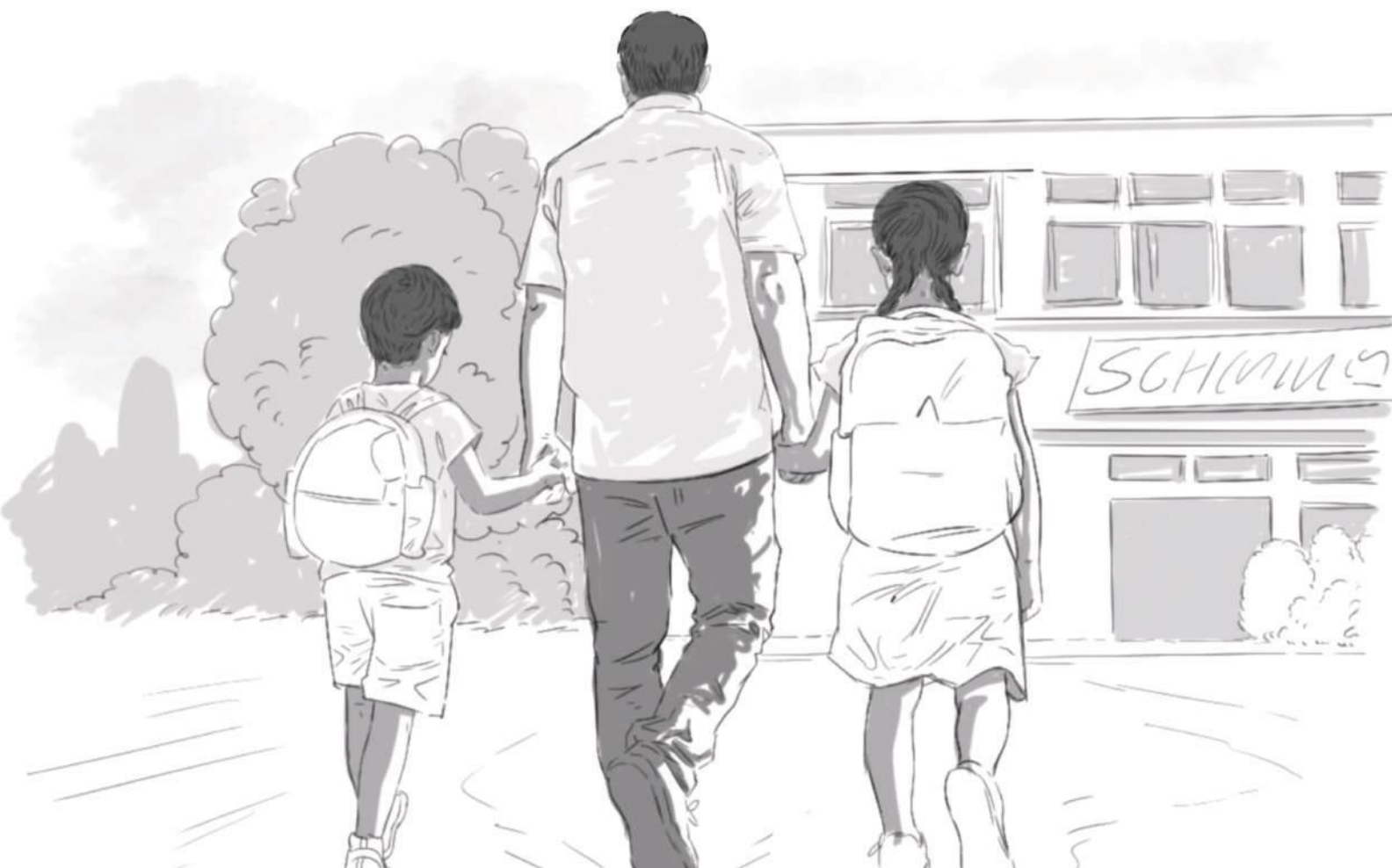




This changed Raja's income scale and his working hours. He could now work more reasonable hours and even dream of moving out of the slums with his wife, Shuba and his two 'bandars' as he likes to call them, Rudra and Jeevika.

Raja's story is a lesson in a spirit that never gave up, no matter the hurdles. From sneaking into golf courses to becoming a coach, his tale echoes the resilience within us all. We need to ascertain how sports in a country where poverty is pandemic is often a leveler and ladder to change one's circumstances. On the stadium, golf course and on the tennis court, potential and drive triumph over social class and condition.

Often young people who want to pursue a sport have to work in the allied services that go with the particular sport. They could become ball boys on tennis courts, pitch keepers in cricket or caddies in golf. They face the challenges of expensive sport kits and funds needed to visit tournaments. Persistence and talent breeds courage and determination to overcome these barriers. We often come across many able sports people hindered by economic and social class in the pursuit of their dreams.







English education in India is available to a small elite within the social and economic capitals of our country. Raja's weakness was his English, a handicap that he struggled to overcome.

Club memberships, being prohibitive, sadly are available to a higher economic strata and beyond the means of many others. This economic barrier was another hurdle in Raja's dream - but he persisted!

A majority of India's poor live in slums for incomes that are less than three dollars a day. A social apartheid cemented by economic disparity and limited even to schooling in the medium of English, limits the young, bringing a premature and permanent end to their dreams.



Raja, born into extremely difficult circumstances, rose to the challenge. A modern-day hero who built access into a system of an elite sport such as *Golf* - where success stories are only told from the perspective of the rich and privileged.

I here write a story from the other side.

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**The side of the people in the city of
dreams - Mumbai, reigned over by an
exceptional man like Raja aka Rajesh Ravi
Mene.**

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