

Privilege of us and them - *Small invisible moments*

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The first ten years of my life was spent in a small town called 'Digboi' where the realization of the propensity of any kind of prejudice towards a particular group of people were not really taught or passed to me covertly. Growing up I did not learn the notion of 'us' and 'them' and that the attitude and approach towards them was not on the basis of their background. It was quite later when I turned 14-15 years of age that I was introduced to the system of reservation and was the beginning of filling out forms for different exams and documents which needed my knowledge regarding "identity". I waited and celebrated Eid and Christmas as much as I waited for Bihu and Durga Puja, never really understanding the different layers of "identities" and as a matter of fact the only identity I knew that I belonged to was of gender. But when I look back and start to dissect my childhood I can hardly recall any systematic treatment by my parents or the people around me- it did exist but in a manner where I was not directly taught about the categorization of the 'other' and which after 20 plus years of my life I realize it was the purest form of privilege.

Prejudices are most of the time extremely cancerous, they are definitely present but in a painful manner but when it starts paining, it has almost reached its last stage. From my childhood days, I came across a few instances that otherwise spoke loudly about the different treatment towards the Bahujans. I remember seeing my then housecleaner not enter the kitchen to clean its floor. A couple years later I was discussing to my mother about affirmative action and people who need it and why, then I told her that somehow the moment about our house cleaner was stuck in my head and asked her if she had prejudices against them. She defended herself saying it was the housecleaner himself who refused to enter the kitchen for being a Bahujan. He voluntarily agreed to carry out roles that were attached to their specific

identities harboring the generalization by himself. She then tells me that our next door neighbor (in 2017) would not allow her house help to enter the kitchen and gave him a different entrance to access the rest of the house for cleaning purposes. The former is how strongly they've internalized the stereotype against them and that negative prejudices are still in all port's words are "fashioned and sustained by self-gratifying considerations".

Secondly, when I was in middle school, a new classmate had just joined my class and his surname was "Balmiki". For me it was the first time I heard such a unique surname and with curiosity I went up to my mother to ask where he came from hoping to get an answer like "West Bengal" or "Maharashtra", instead she said that he's from a lower caste. I kept that in mind without further questioning her as it did not really help me in understanding his identity, She rounded his identity to his caste and somehow the word "lower" made me feel a bit superior to him even though we wore similar uniforms, studied in the same school and had similar housing; I believe the "rubricizing tendency" (All port, 1954) comes out of these life situations. It becomes more odd because my mother grew up in Shillong and there was very little space for discrimination against lower caste people in that state at that time which again tells me that caste identity no matter where you grow up followed the trails of the Hindus (her mother was a Christian who married a non-affirming Hindu).

When I talk about the caste system, I went through a very different kind of frustration towards the reservation system and thankfully it went on for a short period of time in my life. In my 8th standard I had to appear an exam called NTSE (National Talent Search Examination) and few of the kids who passed the exam had performed lower than the rest who received more scores. It was then the students started questioning the reservation system and the upper

caste students who could not pass were angered and that anger was picked up by the rest of the students of the higher castes. Much to my ill thinking, I got on the bandwagon of complaining about the reservation with very little knowledge about their history or the statistics and cribbed about the authenticity of their merit for passing the examination. The conversation around reservation was brought up time and time in the classroom and there was a strong tension between the ones who were visibly disappointed and who had to sit in the class helpless of their identity. This made them separate into human groups, again out of convenience. (All port, 1954) The entire situation that was built was according to me very poorly handled by our school teachers who could have made us understand about affirmative action at that age. It is important for such conversation to be addressed in school itself because for me it was due to my college (government) that I had the opportunity to get introduced to people from different backgrounds that made me understand the entire conversation much better and that it may or may not have worked the same way for my school classmates in their respective college spaces.

In my first year of college in Delhi University, the diversity and women's agency in a women's college was beyond my expectation but this time things were different. In the first year I constantly felt like an outsider even though I was amongst people with similar identities - confirming as females, students and the mutual love for sociology. The notion of their imagination that I was a student from the northeast immediately made them feel that either I should not be a part of their circle or that I would not like to be included. An answer I'm still not quite sure of but whatever it was- there was a problem in it which ultimately pushed me into groups including girls only from the north east in the first year. I believe this shows all port's attitude and belief ingredients when they sideline you because they believe the screwed assumptions against the north east people. But at the same time it was probably quite easier for them to be separated due to the "similar presuppositions". These privileges stay in the nook

and crannies of our lives and to realize its presence and impact is today's challenge.

Biography

Gordon A. (1954). The Nature of Prejudice.