An Adolescent's Musings on Inclusion

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The idea of inclusion had never crossed my mind significantly enough to articulate my thoughts before the eve of the day my class 11th began. My classmates and I had selected our subjects based on which we were all sorted into different sections. I didn't know who all were going to be in my class and I was really apprehensive and scared. From what I had heard, everyone had already decided who they were going to sit with for the next two years. I, on the other hand, didn't even know about most of my classmates. I had nightmares that I would be alone and that I wouldn't be accepted as I will have no one to talk to for the next two years. As the hours ticked away, I contemplated missing my first day.

However, I mustered up every bit of my strength and went to school. Although it took a lot of courage to do so, I think it really taught me how to accept myself first, and then try to be accepted by someone else. I realised that if I weren't comfortable in my own skin and if I felt like an outsider in this classroom, I would always be an outsider. Nevertheless, on reaching school, I realised that there were actually a lot of my classmates who felt the same way: vulnerable, lost, full of hopes and anxieties, and desirous of being welcome and accepted. My friendship began with one person and got extended to a group, so much so that I would really like to hold on to them for a lifetime. I realised that I was so scared the previous night that I almost missed school, but then all I needed was a little help and a little assurance that I will not be alone and my first friend in that new class provided me just that. One helping hand and an accepting heart was all that I needed to be myself again.

But this little phase of insecurity got me thinking that if a girl, who was considered as cheerful and confident and who has been learning in a school about the value of making newcomers feel at home, could be so nervous about going into this new class, I cannot even begin to imagine what it would be like, for a person who has changed schools or for someone who has shifted to a new place. Further, what about the people who are just posted at some place they have never even heard of? Do they all really experience those exact same emotions as myself, though much more intensely? Does the support of one person really matter that much? Is that all one need to feel at home, to feel accepted? Are we all able to find such rays of hope in moments of darkness?

Generally, people tend to form closed groups and discourage any intrusion into their groups out of insecurity or their attachments to their roles and position in the group. They are fearful that this outsider would disturb their relations, equilibrium, and balance. Not just in a class; perhaps, even as communities, societies, and nations, we act in a similar way. Countries are not willing to welcome foreigners because they fear that these outsiders may interfere with their comfort and they may threaten their livelihood by giving stiff competition. The affluent nations are not willing to share their resources with developing countries. So, they hinder transfer of technology and ensure that benefits of innovation do not reach poor nations. Thus, they develop an affinity towards their own. Be it their own groups, family, school, or whatever. And that becomes their comfort zone. That is one place where they feel safe and are not threatened by anything or anyone in any way at all. So, it's pretty obvious that they wouldn't like to change too much about it. Basically, why make the effort to let anyone else in and cause disruption when everything is good the way it is. And thus, when someone new comes into the picture, they face resistance and are not welcome wholeheartedly.

Nowadays, the government has come up with ways to include all sections of society, but I wonder how effective these ways are. Does reserving some seats in educational institutions and jobs for the deprived sections guarantee them dignity and respect? Does giving admissions to children of the poor in schools ensure that they are not harassed and bullied? One may believe that schools have uniforms so that the rich can't be distinguished from the poor, but those who want to discriminate do find other ways to do so, whether it be bag, shoes, geometry box, pens, or even a lunch box. We really hope that the teachers don't keep in mind their respective family incomes while they impart education to them. However, when even the children, nowadays, have developed a mind-set wherein they befriend people who match

their economic status, then what should others do? Should they learn to live with the fact that they are somehow less human, because they don't have a ton of money stacked in some bank?

I cannot even imagine how would someone feel at the age of five to know that the entire class was invited to someone's birthday party while she was the only one left behind. A person, who doesn't even know the alphabets yet, is made to wonder what is wrong with him. And how would a parent explain the reason of such an incident? Is it not shameful for not just the country, but the whole society, to belittle someone to a point where they start believing that they don't even have a right to dream big, let alone do anything to break free of this cycle. We have built walls so high that we are even afraid to marry outside our own caste and any boy or girl who tries to challenge the established norms is killed in the name of honour. Our matrimonial advertisements are still segregated on the basis of caste.

I feel that, it is time for the people to realise that we are all humans and we all have the right to dream and to make earnest efforts to achieve them. We need to realise that the slightest change in our perspective can do wonders just as for someone who has learnt to sit alone in class, one tiny encouraging smile and a polite 'hello' would make some difference. It might encourage someone to love themselves and accept themselves for who they are and to finally stop trying to be someone they are not. We all need to be assured, time and again, that we are fine just the way we are. Probably, that can only be done when we accept the fact that we are all different and it is not a bad thing. We are all unique in our own ways and we are all made a little differently.

I believe, we should learn to accept and respect everyone for who they are. It is now imperative that we stop discriminating on the basis of sex, colour, caste, religion, or other such criteria. We are all special and we are all destined for greatness but we just need to be more welcoming, supportive, and caring towards others.