

CONNECT
special

Newsletter

October 2016

Editor's Note



Dear friends,

Have you experienced the conflict between identity and individuality?? How many times? Who won? Was it to your liking?

This edition brings together some struggles, some choices and perspectives where in individuality and identities are at cross roads at every step of life yet co-exist in this society. The electric blue and purple color scheme represent individuality and identity.

The next month's newsletter would carry your opinions on this topic. Awaiting your views and looking forward for a discussion forum !!

Happy reading!

Regards

Bhavna Botta

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Preface---

The term *identity* is often used to refer to the self, expressions of individuality and the groups to which people belong". Identity is a label which is both relational and contextual in nature. This helps us to fit in a group, have a feeling of well being and in turn becomes our belief, our reality and ends up molding us.

"Our actions shape our identity, and in turn, our identity shapes our actions", our society rules us on this. All our choices of what to wear, where to be, job to do are influenced by this very identity. Some of us put a greater emphasis on group identity. In effect, "their sense of identity is created through taking a part of everyone with who they bond and adding it to their own sense of self".

Can we choose an identity that signals to the world our core values and unique choices?

Individuality on the other hand is "the particular characters or qualities that distinguish one person from others". These qualities and convictions proceed to shape the life whether others like it or not. Individuality promotes creative understanding, not influenced by other people's fears, self reliance, courage for new ideas, inspire others and ultimately living with more joy.

A highly individualistic person has higher abilities and could fall into the egoistic pit very easily. Research says only when spiritual individuality emerges; they will be free of egoism and selfishness. Encouraging individuality helps not just the individual but society as a whole. It is individuality that helps people to have a clear sense of what they need to be happy about than making people about them.

How does one balance identity and individuality or do we choose one over the other, is it possible ??

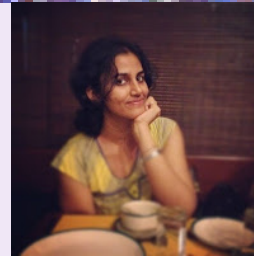
CONNECT
special

Newsletter

October 2016

Peace Within, With Myself

- **Kirthi Jayakumar**



It didn't irk me when I came back home every summer day from school, browned to perfection by the scorching sun.

It didn't irk me when the next year, my mum gave me a tiny blob of cream to keep sun tans at bay. *Kirthi, she'd say, your skin needs protection from the sun. This is called sunscreen.*

The summer I used sunscreen, I didn't tan. And that's when it began. It irked me when a teacher singled me out and used me as an example for "perfectly dark".

It irked me when another teacher drew me aside and said I should use a mix of gram flour and water in a paste so I could be fairer.

It irked me when the kids in school decided that I should be picked last for throw ball teams because the darkest goes last.

It irked me when some girls told kids not to vote me in as a house captain because, well, how ugly would a dark person be, holding the flag for the house?

It irked me when classmates at college said I was ugly because I was dark. That I would never be pretty, even if I took pretty pills. That ugly, dark faces like mine should only see the receiving end of acid.

Hold on just one moment, I'd think to myself. If dark made me ugly, does your assessment make you fair? Fair, in the right meaning of the term?

Here are some facts.

I am dark. But I also have two eyes, one nose, a mouth, a pair of ears, a pair of hands and a pair of feet just like everybody else.

I am dark. But I also have a heart, a sense of feeling and emotions just like everybody else.

I am dark. But I am also human. I can't say I'm just like everybody else here: because if the discriminating critical masses that rely on skin colour as a qualification for the norm, are indeed the norm themselves, I'm happy to be the exception.

I will never say that I survived my skin colour: what is the need to 'survive' something that isn't a bad thing? I will say that I wear my skin colour with pride. And how.

This led me to mull over the idea of identity and individuality. What if I made my identity about me, about my individuality, rather than what society decided as my identity – a dark skinned girl? And that led me to find peace within, with myself.

Kirthi Jayakumar, Founder/Director- The Red Elephant Foundation, is a Lawyer/Writer and an avid reader with a keen interest in Peace and Conflict, Public International Law and Gender issues. She has worked as a volunteer with the UN, as an advocate and activist with several grass root organizations and academic foundations. Her interest and experience over all lie in Afghanistan, the Middle East, DR Congo and South-Asia.

Newsletter

October 2016

From The Heart

-V.S. Sunder

They could call him a black politician from the smoke-filled rooms and crime-filled streets of Chicago: he is Barack Obama, the American President, after whose compassionate term in office, the world is dreading the prospect of a possible term of the hate-spewing white-supremacy-touting Donald Trump.

They could call her a deaf-blind daughter of an Eritrean American refugee: she is Haben Girma who, despite the obviously stacked hand led by Fate is a graduate of the Harvard law school and advocate par excellence of disability rights.

They might call you Divyang-jan and profess to have started numerous schemes with fancy Sanskrit names and high-faulting alleged aims to help your lot: but you could be a Dr. Jeeja Ghosh whom they de-board from a flight you had boarded en-route to giving an invited lecture at a conference, because the cerebral palsy you are a victim of, convinces the pilot that you may be a risk to the security of 'his passengers'!

They could identify me as an Indian national with Multiple Sclerosis who could make inordinate demands on their facilities (in spite of my doctor, a neurologist of international reputation of high standing, stating in no uncertain terms that, accompanied by my wife and care-giver, I could travel to New Zealand or wherever I cared to), and deny me a tourist visa for two-weeks, thereby depriving us of the possibility of celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary with our daughter who was undergoing a programme at a Film School in Wellington: I am a research mathematician who has been invited to (and given visas to attend) conferences all over the world.

The identity card they pin on your lapel does not mean anything: what the individual achieves does.

Sunder could be put in a pigeon-hole marked 'person with Multiple Sclerosis', and therefore denied a two-week visitor visa by New Zealand. He could also be invited as Professor Sunder, the Operator Algebraist to reputed Universities/Institutes in USA, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Denmark, Japan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, and even New Zealand some years before they became wise to his MS!



Newsletter

October 2016

Our Identity as a Garden of Human Diversity

- Anu Naidu

Human life is like a garden, filled with flowers and weeds of diverse colours, sizes and fragrances. One can choose to look at the big picture or the individual details. Our identity is like that! At the individual level, our ideas, feelings and our physical form offer us a personal identity. However, the question of who we are also includes our social identity.

Hence, while I am a woman, a mother, a writer, a gourmet cook, a connoisseur of music and a traveller, I am also an Indian, an employee, a volunteer for a disability rights group. There is an innate tendency we have to compare and categorise ourselves into "us" and "them" and to judge ourselves and our friends as being better than the average.

Of course, we feel we are better students, workers, mothers, teachers, doctors or cooks than most people. We are drawn to those whom we perceive as being superior to the rest. Being aware of this tendency helps us build bridges and expand our circle of friends to include those who are different or less privileged. In this way, we can build a beautiful garden of human diversity right in the midst of our lives.

"Friendship is the most beautiful, most powerful and most valuable treasure in life. It is your true wealth. No matter how much status people may gain or how rich they may become, a life without friends leads to an unbalanced, self-centered existence."

- Daisaku Ikeda

Anu Naidu is a teacher, writer and spirited traveller who has followed the journey of the disability rights movement.



Snippet-

Cyathlon



It was a virtual running race with obstacles. But it was no ordinary computer game. Competitors controlled their race avatars on the screen using only their thoughts and no other body movement. Their thoughts were translated into virtual action through a cap with multiple electrodes fitted on their head.

Much like athletes in shooting or archery, contestants needed a sharp focus. But the fact that they were quadriplegic set this race apart. People with severe motor disabilities had just successfully used a computer device through their brain signals.

This was the Brain Computer Interface (BCI) race, one of the six disciplines, at the world's first Cyathlon, Zurich. Cyathlon managed to bring out the best of some assistive technologies and challenged some others.

<http://www.sporttechie.com/2016/10/09/technology/cyathlon-celebrated-assistive-technology>

CONNECT
special

Newsletter

October 2016

Analytical -Shivani Gupta



The day I had my accident I became a 'disabled person' -- an identified category by the government of people who deserve 'special' provisions as their impairment inhibits them to 'fit in' a world that is designed and managed for the non-disabled majority. Such a 'special' treatment is known to have segregated and isolated people with disabilities.

I became disabled more than 25 years ago. I lost my ability to walk because of an accident but more importantly I lost my identity as a person. For me the toughest part of the disability I faced was coming to terms with the loss of identity as an individual with multiple facets.

The attitude, opinion of people towards my disability preceded my abilities.

The identification of groups in administrative categories is commonly used in social policy, with disability as one of the categories. Perhaps it is important to ensure that the most disadvantaged have access to the limited government aid that is available. Yet a blanket approach of addressing the disadvantaged without addressing individual needs, preferences, personal characteristics such as age gender, resources not just in terms of monetary resources and the environment they live in is how individual lose their identity. To illustrate this I would give the example of the assistive aids distributions camps organized by the government. Several wheelchairs are distributed without considering physical characteristics of an individual neither the environment they would use. This results in the aid not being comfortable for the recipient who may abandon it or selling it for small monetary gain. There is a need to re-address the practices and policies that take such a blanket approach.

Persons with disabilities have been advocating to be recognized as persons with equal rights and recognition. This has resulted in a shift in the way disability is viewed which is seen as of a social construct. This view is translated in the convention of the rights of persons with disabilities that does not define disability. This shifts the focus on the external world that needs to be made more inclusive rather than expecting people with disabilities to 'fit in'. While this is extremely promising, there is a lot that would need to be done to achieve this from change in policy design, improving accessibility to awareness rising of the community at large.

The issue of disability identity is far more complex than that can be written in this piece but just to end I'll like to write about a headline I read sometime back 'A disabled man arrested for raping a 3 year old girl...' I would question the need to identify disability in such headlines – what does it add to the news except create stereotype and negative thinking towards people with disabilities.

Shivani Gupta, founder, AccessAbility, is an access consultant. She has worked as a consultant with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) and the Christian Blind Mission (CBM). She has co-authored three publications pertaining to improving accessibility in physical environments for disabled people. She is recipient of the Helen Keller Award (2008), the CavinKare Ability Mastery Award (2008), among many other awards.

Newsletter

October 2016

Self

-Veteran

“Angry Young Man!” was how Amithab Bachan was referred to when he acted in many movies excelling in that role. That does not become his identity since he took on many more different roles apart from that and did equally well. His individuality? No one knows better than he himself.

I give this example since we play many many roles in life .Mother’s group, women’s group , students group, gang of friends.No matter how many of these groups a persons belongs, there is an inner self with some core values . I strongly believe that one can be a part of all these groups and still keep ones individuality intact provided we are aware of it.

This recognition is very important for a teacher. A teacher will have students with so much diversity and can encourage the students to value each other for what they are. When all students respect her/him it simply means that this teacher has understood each individual student..taken the student along and helped the student move forward. . Each student has felt that he/she is important.

Similarly an inclusive leader respects each of the team member and bring out the best from that individual to have an effective team.

In short identity and individuality is like the rainbow colours which are known as rainbow colours when they are together making that wonderful rainbow, but are equally and uniquely beautiful when they are alone spreading their beauty where ever they appear.

Your comments ,suggestions are valuable ,so are your subscriptions.

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Points To Ponder

On a daily basis, the actions you take, the people you spend time with, and the principles you choose to defend will define your identity.

Some identity questions -

- What am I standing for in the world?
- Do I like it?
- Whom am I standing with?
- Why did I make the choice?
- When did I make the choice?
- How will I make my identity visible?

To Develop Individuality -

- Identify and revolve life around what you are good at
- Be just what you are-don't change yourself for society
- Be true and honest to yourself.

