

“If you love without evoking love in return - that is, if your loving as loving does not produce reciprocal love: if through a living expression of yourself as a loving person you do not make yourself a beloved one, then your love is impotent - a misfortune.” - K.M

I remember in school when kids would talk about how affirmative action made it harder to be white. Apparently it signaled that now white people could be penalized for being white, that all of a sudden standards of merit were trumped by race - indeed here was the infamous race card - and thus positions at top universities were inevitably going to go to students of color. It took me years to understand the two faced logic needed to profess this as well as what it must confess in contradiction.

This willful ignorance to structural and historical legacies that have held back minorities for hundreds of years and continue to do so, reflects that even a great school's education had failed in this respect. Here were students going out into the world with the sentiment that they were the cream of the crop by ability alone. That their claim to the world was one based on intellect and hard work, not money, privilege, or connections. This sense of proprietary entitlement that people of color were potentially encroaching upon left me and many others feeling that we had to work harder for anything that was going to come our way. It meant that you couldn't make mistakes. That you couldn't just be their equal but had to be their better to be taken as an equal. It meant that you carried this mentality with you wherever you went - the movies, a restaurant, the bank, the airport, the subway; that your failures were never just your own nor were your successes.

And yet colonialism is hard to beat. My father and many of his friends immigrated soon after 1965, when the American dream was finally sold to South Asians. It was a good year - atrocious for Bordeaux - but limitlessly good for those Indians of higher education that could now apply for visas. Those selected were educated Indians, ones that despite coming with merely dollars in their pocket, already had a down payment on American life since they came with degrees. Degrees of course don't stop racism or hardship, but they do give you a leg up in assimilating by means of money. Many felt that if they could succeed, then it was in fact the laziness of others that caused their failure. Don't blame others, or mooch off society, or keep taxing the very people that are creating jobs. Within the patriarchy of immigrant life, this was the mantra often sung. And internalizing this was in a sense the remains of a mental and economic colonialism. It was in '75 that less educated, less well-off Indians came, allowing us to have conflicting images of brown people - the doctor and the taxi driver, the engineer and the quiki-mart worker. But since I was a child of a doctor, I sang too, even as I attended the inauguration of George W. Bush in 2000. I really wanted to believe I was exactly like everyone else (already so narrow), and that my mother's admonition that I would have

to work harder than a white student for the same reward was merely the vestiges of a racism that ended with their generation. I bought the dream by proxy.

9/11 changed all that. The membership into a white world that I had so assiduously earned was then called into question. The jokes and playful fears manifested in suggesting I better not grow a beard when I go to New York were meant to show that I wasn't a terrorist, but that I'm one facial hair mishap away from fitting the description. Then I got to New York, and felt the power of Patriot Act. I saw brown families torn apart, businesses destroyed, good men villainized and jailed, the ugliness of legal loopholes, and heard clicks on my own phone. I saw that justice could not be met when you simplify an -ism into an enemy, or when you seize the rights of one kind of citizen because another felt unsafe. It seemed to me that the war against people of color had erupted at that very moment.

I was of course wrong - it has been waged for centuries. But a coming together of people of color is slightly more recent. Gandhi's work touching Dubois', Robeson's touching Chattopadhyaya. The Bandung Conference of 1955 being the first large scale Afro-Asian conference where they actively debated the place of the third world, a designation coined by Alfred Sauvy relating it to the third estate, and allying it with revolution. To me, the name now has the feeling of something like Science Fiction, utopian and transformative. Solidarity grew, and my purview into the world of inequality, so complicated as it was, only grew in contradictions. Because despite knowing all this, it was a struggle to speak about it with my peers, my friends, even my family. It was never enough to state the obvious. It was never enough to describe that many live in fear of losing their home to a predatory loan, or suffer from the problems of addiction, or fear that a teacher will call the cops rather than the counselor, or that the cops will someday kill your son; or when you're treated as a criminal even after death and absolution, because they won't dignify your death because it would be undignified - like when you call a man looking for food a looter. There was always a "yes, but." Always a statement of qualification, one that wanted to temper the obvious fury when it had every right to exist without mitigation.

Indeed it was in spite of this backdrop, that they could still muster the effort to not hold my hand in comprehension, but to offer a counter example to prevailing horrors. Incredulity becomes a kind of insanity, when you're talking to yourself. In the end, even if the house is flooding, the baby screaming, and the lights flickering to the metre of your twitching eye, you still can't stop working, because if you did you might be caught slacking. The lights flicker because you're not pedaling fast enough. And people can see that. They'll say you don't deserve the pie in the sky as much as the next guy, and fair is fair, right? So get back on the bike and keep on the lights. And when the water reaches you neck just remember that even then, you better work harder underwater.

It is this vast sentiment that becomes a kind of eternal, ongoing baptism, a different mantra that would be our engine towards endless regeneration and empowerment. It is also very possibly the thing that will drown and kill us.

-Ajay Kurian, 2015

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