

Privileged

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By most women, I would be considered privileged - and they would not be wrong. I am privileged, although it took me twenty-one years and living in a hostel to realise that.

The first time it really hit me was hearing, from one of my male classmates, that "women become different as soon as they get a little bit of money. They become harder. Men shouldn't give them money - it goes to their heads." He wasn't the only one : the other males in the vicinity were nodding in agreement. I would like to say that I did try to be diplomatic. I did try to say, "Not everyone is the same. You cannot judge everyone just based on a few." My male colleague disagreed. He said all the women he'd seen were like that. Pissed off, I told him that I had seen men becoming insecure when their wives earned more than them. Does that, perhaps, signify that all men are insecure sexists?

The thing is, I don't know if I won that argument - and neither do I care. I walked away blindsided that people could consider that sort of thinking the norm. Me, with my city-bred ways, suggesting that men were insecure when their wives earned more than them was the exception!

Most of my teenage life, I remember thinking that no matter what, I would forever be held back from doing things men would consider their birthright to do. This was every time I wanted to go on a trip with my friends and would promptly be shot down because "you're not going off alone with boys without a guardian." I

wasn't allowed to go out alone after sunset. I was supposed to check in with my parents every time I went out. My mother didn't like me laughing too loudly in public, and often scolded me for my infractions.

But here's the thing : I've never been told "it's going to be time for you to get married soon." This is something I've taken for granted, always, knowing I had time to set up a career before I got married. Most of my classmates do not have this... luxury. I personally know several who are engaged, or are on the way. Their parents are already looking at match for them - and we haven't finished our undergraduate degrees yet. Whereas I get my dad teasing me that my mom is talking to the other woman about my marriage, and my mom looking disgusted when I confront her in a panic over it. "Don't be silly. There's no question of such things right now."

Then, of course, there was the time the boyfriend of my classmates forbade her from taking part in a dancing competition. He didn't want her "exposing" herself. And all I could think was, I would probably have broken up with him if my boyfriend would have ever dared say such a thing.

I vividly remember one evening when I was asking a friend what specialisation she wanted to go into (post MBBS, obviously.) And she said her family wanted her to be a gynecologist - so that was what she would go into. I was actually surprised to know that - because when I'm asked the same question, I'm like - I haven't decided yet. My family tells me nothing beyond that.

Never have I even been suggested to do a particular specialisation, let alone told to do so.

This and so many other things - like not being told what to wear. I've never been told to "cover up" or wear a shorter dress. I've been taught to look men in the eye. I've never been told that I am, or will ever be, lesser than someone with a Y chromosome.

So yes, I suppose I can call myself privileged. I don't really have much ground to talk about oppression of women, and the struggles a woman faces, not only in India but the world as a whole.

Except. Except, that I have been groped in public when I didn't even understand the meaning of the word. I only knew that it hurt.

Going to a mall with my friends, dressed in tops and jeans, and suddenly stopping realising there's flashes of light. Looking down and seeing a pervert taking pictures of us and laughing when he realises we've seen him. Not daring to go down there and slap the stuffing out of him because we were all girls.

Being privileged didn't stop my tutor from molesting a thirteen year old (me).

The point is, there are no privileged women. That's what the entire point of this piece of writing is. If you're privileged enough, you get to come out of your mother's womb alive.

If you're privileged enough, she won't strangle you after you're born.

If you're privileged enough, you get to attend school with your brothers.

If you're privileged enough, you'll manage to finish senior secondary. (And not have to leave school the day you hit

puberty.)

If you're privileged enough, you won't be sold off in the name of marriage.

If you're privileged enough, you'll even be allowed to have a career.

(There's a different class of privilege if you get to have a career post your marriage, too.)

If you're privileged enough, you get to give birth to a girl without being shamed for it.

If you're privileged enough, you get to enjoy (on a smaller scale) the same things that all males can consider a birthright.

And no amount of privilege will take away the fear, the instinctive wariness that any woman feels when she walks into a room full of strange men. No amount of privilege will stop her from thinking twice before going out alone at night. No amount of privilege will prevent her from knowing what it feels like to be leered at, or to be catcalled, or to be stalked.

No amount of privilege will prevent her from getting paid lesser for the same job, with the exact same qualifications as the male getting a higher pay package than her.

No amount of privilege will stop a "well-meaning aunt" from asking her when her marriage is, and if she is married, when she will have kids.

You see, it is a woman's lot in life to have to struggle harder for the same things that the man will receive as a god-given right. All privilege really does is help you recognize that.

#MeToo, because any woman who has ever cursed herself for being born a woman, and not a man, will know what I mean.