

Realising your own privilege

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Something you're born into, privilege, really isn't as easy to realise as it seems from an outsider's perspective. As we go further towards a more globalised society, the world around us is getting smaller than ever before. These days everyone has an opinion about everything, and everyone has a platform to voice their opinions.

Living in one's own bubble is something one has to actively work at to achieve. That is why, realising our own privilege is more important now than ever before, because otherwise we may come across as pompous, ignorant and insensitive.

Being born into privilege is not a choice, what's important is the realisation that a lot of things come easier, directly or indirectly, if you are born into a certain class. There are times when we inadvertently blame people for things that are out of their control. It is very natural to hear of someone's problems, put ourselves in their shoes, and imagine ourselves handling the situation better. More often than not, this is where we stumble.

EDUCATION

A few examples are in order, and there are plenty going around. For instance, we constantly see people complaining about other's English proficiency. Especially in an educational institution when we are grouped with someone who cannot present well in English, it can irritate us to no avail. There are a lot of factors involved in one's ability to speak well in public though. Before questioning someone's abilities to speak English, we need to think about how far they may have come to be where they are now.

For example, if they haven't grown up in the city, or in a moderately well-off family, it is unlikely that they were exposed to proper English influences in their childhood. Their parents may not be as educated as yours. They might not have grown up watching English television. If they have picked up current English pop-culture, that has probably come after a struggle. The best way to approach another person's English skills is to think about how well you would do in your first few years of learning another language. Consider whether you would judge yourself as harshly as you are judging someone else for not being fluent at a second language.

A question that could help keep privilege in check is: what if I hadn't been born in Dhaka, and had to make my way here from some other less developed district? Or, let alone another district, imagine the tools which may have not been at your disposal had you been born in a less stable family. We may believe our abilities are a result of our hard work and talent alone, but aside from those things, the people we become, and the qualities we develop, are an absolute reflection of our upbringing and the opportunities available to us, in short- our privilege.

SELF-DEVELOPMENT

This privilege has a curious way of rearing its head in places where one wouldn't expect it. Have you ever considered working on self-development e.g. by getting involved in extra-curricular or voluntary activities, a privilege? Being given the opportunity to take time out of one's day to work on one's own abilities, while not having to worry about providing some finances for the family, or paying one's own tuition, or even preparing one's own meals. These things are privileges that we constantly take for granted. Students who also have to con-

tribute to their family's monthly expenditure cannot afford to take an unpaid or low-paying internship over tuitions, regardless of how much better the former would be for their future prospects. Time and energy are crucial to working on oneself, and privilege can buy you those things.

SAFETY

Many a times we see someone involved custom-made meals? The first time I realised that my privilege actually lets me stick to a weight loss regime, I was left mind-boggled because of its implications. What other areas could I be advantaged at due to my privilege that I had never really thought about?

An even more essential aspect of life that is aided immensely by privilege is safety. Yes, safety is a privilege. The fact that being able to take life-saving precautions is a privilege still leaves me dumbfounded sometimes.

level of security. The everyday choices we make, the places we deem too dangerous to go to, the offices we may think look too shady to work at, these decisions and choices are a direct by-product of privilege.

What we have to realise is that people are direly trying to make ends meet in this city. Not everyone can afford to make the "smartest" or the "safest" choices. Some have elderly parents they need to support. Others have to worry about paying their own tuition fee. If you're one of the very few in this country who don't have to worry about such things, consider yourself highly fortunate, and think twice



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Another luxury of enormous significance is having house-help. For instance, can you imagine trying to lose weight on a diet without help? Working, studying, and then also worrying about painstakingly preparing and eating your own

in a bus or bike accident. If the person is a woman, it is highly likely that her reasons for being on public transport will be questioned. I've been surprised myself when a colleague revealed that she comes to work on a ride-sharing bike every day. Fortunately I didn't tell her anything along the lines of "But don't you know how unsafe it is?" because of course she does. She knows. But what else can she do? Bus rides are even more cumbersome for women, and she can't afford a CNG every day. In stark contrast to this, people with private transport are availing an incomparable

before questioning why some people may seem to be stuck in a bad situation that you think you could have easily worked yourself out of. Being born into privilege is not a crime, but not educating yourself about it makes you prone to formulating some very narrow ideas about society and the world at large, and that, in this age of information and awareness, is unacceptable.

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