

/ Social Acceptance /

in the fast - paced society

by avni parashar

Once on a dark and cold night in the middle of December, a newborn girl took her first breath, unaware of the unpredictable journey that would lay ahead. As I emerged into the world, wrapped in the silence of that wintry night, little did I know that my story was about to unfold in ways I could never anticipate.

Hey! I'm Anaya Prakash, a 15-year-old girl in New Delhi. As I grew up, I learned to rely on myself, especially during school. You might be wondering, "Did she have no friends?" Well, yup, not only did I have no friends, but I didn't want to make any either! You see, I have this thing called "Cataract" in my left eye, a cloudy area in the lens that affects my vision. Growing up, people often judged me for it, which made me reluctant to open up to others.

Then, in middle school, I met them - Kyra Choudhary, Tanvi Singh, and Saisha Sharma. They became the friends I needed in my life! I was grateful to have found them; it was like discovering a missing part of myself. They never judged me for my cataract or treated me differently. We formed a tight-knit group, inseparable from each other. If you were friends with me, you were friends with all of us, that's how close we were.

Fast forward to 9th grade... Our group experienced a whole rollercoaster ride! We faced unpleasant fights, like this one time the entire group was against Saisha because she had started to be a sort of mean girl. She used to talk behind everyone's back and acted as she was the boss of everyone. Eventually, we solved it out before winter break, things become fine at that time.

We had also cherished memorable moments together!

Like this one time, we had this huge hangout together and just had loads of fun and took awesome pictures!! And once the entire group has come to my writing contest where I had won 1st place!!! And they even came to swimming tournaments!

I had hoped my cataract wouldn't affect our friendship like it did when we had that massive argument which had completely changed our group. But it turns out, I needed a change of mindset...

Present Day – 22.04.2024

I walked in the library full of silence and empty faces, a pair of footsteps approached me, unable to see who it was I looked close and still was unsure of who was upon me. until I heard a quite familiar voice...

“ Look Anaya, we don't know how to say this, but this was a complicated yet thoughtful decision the group has decided to make against you. “ said Kyra unpleasantly.

There I was, quite literally flabbergasted! What could she have to possibly say about me which could have been that complicated? and that's when she said it, the words I dread to hear from anyone, "Anaya, you have been a great friend, seriously! but you know your whole Cataract thing is a lot now since we are in 9th grade, and our reputation is for sure going to get ruined with you being our friend." says Tanvi distinctly. She further added, "When you stand near us, all faces turn up to our side and we assume we're being targeted by them all.

Needless to say, We feel harassed by all this and now collectively we'll agreed that we need to discuss this with you but we're not finding the courage to do so...."

These words expressed by her were sounded as bomb to me!

Shocked, but mostly disappointed hearing that from the people who I value most. I should've expected this coming my way, of course my Cataract had to ruin everything. Professionally, to make it seem as if I didn't care about what they do to me, before I could even open my mouth my "friend" Saisha had yelled, "**WE DON'T LIKE YOU!! YOU'RE SUCH A FREAK AND WILL BECOME NOTHINGS IN THE FUTURE WITH YOUR LITTLE CATARTACT!!**"

At that point I was going to burst into tears but instead I concluded not to say anything against them since who knows what they could've replied to me if I even dared to reply. So, I simply responded with, "Ok. If you didn't want to be friends in the first place, you could've just said so." calmly.

Deep down, it was confusion for me, I couldn't believe what I just heard, at first, I thought they were joking but Saisha had expressed her emotions, I could tell it was seriously no joke. With utmost shame, I left the library with droplets of tears coming out of my eyes.

Eventually I started walking in the halls of my school, as I did time flew and it was dispersal time and I walked to the bus in awkwardness as I heard the giggles of my old group behind me, I started walking even more faster, as I finally reached my bus my mood lit up, at least my friend Yana was still nice to me...

4 days went by,

I got bullied by them, when I say bully, I mean intense bullying was going on with me. They said a bunch of rude stuff to me and even made other people go against me!! Crazy right? Well, it gets worse, the people who supported me at that time, they tried to get some update about how I was feeling or if I was depressed by not being with them anymore. Luckily, the people who supported me didn't come through with their messed-up stuff. If I'm being honest, the people who supported me were the people who I thought were extremely judgmental, or somewhat cunning. I was wrong. At that moment, I realized... I needed to make a comeback! I said to myself, "Come on Anaya!!! You can't keep dealing with this bullying and all these horrible comments being made on you.

You must do something about it!"

That thought hit me, I then had delved deeper into my thoughts, "What do I want?!"

Well... I want respect.

You're probably like, "Huh? You have Cataract though!! How can you possibly do something while having that!!"

Well, since it was the end of the school year before we went into 10th grade, our school had an award celebration in where the students in our grade would be honored for their achievements which they made throughout their grade. And I am quite a writer myself, so I thought why not try to add more achievements to prove those girls wrong.

Ever since that day, I have been studying a lot in my weak areas such as math and I have started to understand a lot more now! I just kept getting better and better and soon I had gotten my grades way higher than before in subjects like math and science! even my teachers were shocked that ME? the girl who has cataract is SMART? A lot of kids from my grade started to talk to me and be my friend, some kids were even proud to have me as their friend! That was one of the best moments of my life. I was... proud of myself. On the other hand, those girls weren't too happy about it, they kept denying the fact that I was more superior than them. Mostly, they tried to fill their head with thoughts of how I apparently "cheated" on most of the assessments and even tried to tell the teachers to downgrade my reputation that like usual, but no one gave in because some people believed in me!

Here came the day which was waited for a long time...
The Awards Celebration.

I was so excited yet fearful if my award which I would be getting wouldn't be the best thing ever, my supportive friends lit up my mood and I started to focus on the positive side of the celebration instead! All the sections were called up one by one in order, and at last... My section came, and since my name starts with the letter A, I had to go first in receiving my award. Everyone was watching, teachers, parents, and the worst of them all, Kyra, Tanvi, and Saisha. My name was called up, I stood bold and confident and walked to stage with utmost potential. The principal of my school, Mrs. Kumar, then started to display my achievement on the big screen and I couldn't believe what I had just heard!

Mrs. Kumar said with well pleased voice, "Anaya Prakash, getting an award for being one of the BEST writers in the ENTIRE grade!! As well as, pursuing excellence in math and science as well as being one the most thrilling members of the Swimming Team!! We all are very proud of you Anaya; may you keep shining and being absolutely amazing!"

I was so happy that I smiled super hard while my photo was being taken with my award by the photographer, One click, and I was off the stage with utmost satisfaction in myself. You may be thinking, hard work does pay off, well, indeed it does! But one thing I had realized as soon as I came off the stage and the girls who bullied me were there too and give me an ugly look, it made me have a sort of reality check, that things come your way like obstacles in your life, and you must overcome them with no fear,

have faith in yourself. Do the hard work for you! Not for others.

When I left the atrium, I thought to myself, those girls don't care if I win or lose, sure, they might feel some shame that they thought me having Cataract would affect them but overall, I was the one who cared. I was proud of myself; I got the respect I wanted. And that was all I needed to make myself feel more ecstatic again.

Soon, nobody really judged me or anybody with a difference. Honestly, it's just society which makes things "weird". You don't always have to give in to them! Since I made an impact to everyone by showing them, I'm not a normal useless girl with Cataract, I'm Anaya Prakash, a girl who can accomplish many great things!

Finally, more and more people started to have more social and personal development in themselves. Oh, and if you're wondering how those girls are doing, well... let's just say they're still feeding into each other's little thoughts, but they've gotten more nicer to a few people, that's major improvement for them!

Sometimes, focusing on things which make you get power, respect, and success really matter. Take it from me.

Moral of the story: Do things to prove yourself, not others.