

Animals and Humans

बंदर और इंसान

Surabhi Shukla

www.genderdiversityandschools.in





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“Raju, wake up! Don't you have to go to school?” mom's voice came crashing through the branches of the tree. Raju was awake but he did not feel like going to school. He had sports period today and Raju did not enjoy going playing football. All the other monkeys would tease Raju because of this and even Cheetah sir, the sports teacher would not let Raju be in peace. “Raju, won't you play football? Real little boy monkeys play football. Don't act like a girl. Come and stand in the field!” sir would say. “Why do I have to play football to be a real boy monkey? I like to sit with the girl monkeys and talk. I don't like to play football.” Raju was lost in these thoughts when mom's voice came rushing in once more, “Raju, hurry up!”

In fact, Raju had been anxious for a few days. His parents were considered to be the smartest and most respected animals in the Nagaraj jungle. All the other animals in the jungle considered them to be very broad minded and progressive. However, Raju was not able to confide in his parents about something very important. Raju did not enjoy school. Everyone would tease him and call him a girl. Sometimes, they would touch him unnecessarily, stroke his back and sometimes they would harass him in the bathroom, “let's see if you are even a real monkey boy.” He was quite disturbed because of these incidents but one did not speak about these kinds of things at his home.

The students had now learnt a new word- GAY. Raju had learnt that to be gay means to be happy. But the way his classmates would call him gay, Raju, who had always been a happy little monkey, had forgotten to be happy. Most of his friends no longer liked to play with him. The few of them that remained tried to fix Raju by sometimes teaching Raju how to walk like a boy and sometimes teaching Raju how to talk like a boy. “Here, walk like a man- wide chested. Like a film hero! Roar like a lion- don't tweet like a little bird!” his friends would say. Did he really tweet like a little bird? And what does it mean to walk like a man- isn't walking, just...walking? Raju stood in front of the mirror and opened his mouth to practice roaring like a lion. As he was about to roar, mom's voice came in yet again, “Raju! If you miss your bus, I will not drop you to school!” His heart was beating hard at the thought of going to school but today Raju had no excuse. He had already missed school twice the previous week, faking illness. That excuse would not work every time. Raju gave in and started getting ready for school.

At school, Raju met Nabeela. Nagaraj jungle was full of snakes-- one could get bitten if one were not careful but this had never scared Nabeela. She had short hair, played football and had no interest in wearing any make-up. Everyone was scared of her and



she was full of life. She spent all her time with Ria. “Ria!” Nabeela thought to herself, “How nice she is! I wish I could spend my entire day with Ria. I will tell her in the sports period that I like her.”

When Nabeela told Ria that she likes her, Ria immediately replied, “I like you too, Nabeela. You are my best friend.” “No, you don't understand”, said Nabeela, “I *like* like you.” “Oh,” replied Ria and ran away from the grounds. Nabeela was still trying to understand what had happened when Ms. Crocodile, the school counselor summoned her. Ms. Crocodile was sensitive to the troubles of students-- that was her job description anyway. In fact, it was very difficult to trust her completely. When Nabeela reached her office, Ms. Crocodile pounced on her, “What did you tell Ria? Don't you know that this is wrong! You need a doctor! If you do this again, I will tell your parents!” Nabeela was stunned. What wrong had she done? When Nabeela left Miss Crocodile's room, she felt a strange gaze of her classmates upon her. “Do they know? Did Ria tell them...or...did Ms. Crocodile...?”

Somehow Nabeela reached the classroom. The next period was of Biology and the teacher was to teach them human reproduction. “Human reproduction!” Cheeku was very happy that this lesson would finally be taught in school. Cheeku had a lot of unanswered questions in his mind. He did not feel like a boy monkey. He liked to dress up and wear make-up like other girl monkeys. He had seen Madhuri Dixit in movies and wanted to be just like her. He even wanted to change his name to Chandini. Isn't that a name befitting a movie star! However, no one understood her in school. Her classmates called her *Chakka*. Even when she complained to the teachers, many of them did not help. The teachers would either sweep the topic under the carpet or blame Chandini for bringing this onto herself. “If you just start behaving more appropriately-- like a boy monkey, all this would end,” they would say. She could not share any of this at home. Right now, she could at least dress up like a girl at school programmes and functions. If she shared her feelings at home, all this would stop.

That is why she had great expectations from the Biology lesson today. When they were in the 5th standard, the teacher had sent all the boys outside and had spoken to all the girl monkeys. The boys never found out what their teacher told the girls but the girls looked very stressed after the conversation. They were in the 8th standard now and reaching puberty but no one had ever spoken to them about their developing feelings. No one had said, “Now you are almost 14 years old, your body is changing and you may have feelings which you may have never felt before. Maybe you have started to like someone...” No one had ever spoken to them like that.



Today was that day! “Ma'am will definitely talk about puberty and feelings while explaining human reproduction!” Chandini thought to herself. Perhaps this is what they call building castles in the air. The Biology teacher came into class and said, “Everyone will silently read the chapter on human reproduction on their own. I will just be back.” The teacher left the class and did not return until the bell rang.

Crestfallen, Raju, Nabeela and Chandini reached home. Another day had ended at school but their troubles felt no closer to resolution. They had begun to hate school-- they did not like to attend it, they did not feel like studying and they felt cut off and isolated from everyone. Sometimes, strange thoughts would enter their minds, “What if we just end all this on our own...”

Regardless of how well they performed in class or how sincere they were, their classmates continued to misbehave with them. “Did they not deserve respect? After all, even the students who did not perform as well as them in class were respected. Their heads were swimming with questions. They had seen some tourists in the jungle a few days ago. Whenever they wanted an answer to any question, they would whip out their phones, switch on the internet and ask a strange thing called GOOGLE for advice. Google would provide them with all the answers. But where do we find Google in the jungle...” They grew drowsy with their thoughts and drifted off to sleep.

That night they saw a dream. They dreamt that they had become humans. Nobody considered them to be strange at school anymore. Nabeela and Ria were still friends. Ria did not like Nabeela in the same way but she did not find anything strange about the fact that Nabeela liked her. Ria understood what these feelings were-- after all, she liked Rinku as well! The teachers at the school were really considerate and sensitive. Cheeku's name had changed to Chandini in the report card. The teachers spoke freely about sex and sexuality. The students were given true and accurate information about these aspects of life. They were told that these things were not bad things-- they were also a part of life and that the students should try to understand and partake of these things in a responsible manner. Everyone had a right to live their life with complete freedom. “Raju, wake up!” once again mom's voice ripped into the room. Raju woke up. Elsewhere, Nabeela and Chandini also woke up.

But that day was different. That day they were filled with hope. The dream had filled them with hope. They thought to themselves, “Wouldn't it have been lovely if we were humans. Humans are so wise and progressive. How sensitive they are! After all, they are not animals.”