

MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF ME

Here I've been able to experience multiple versions of me. I can be an advocate; I can be a leader. It feels good! I didn't see these possibilities before. Yes, I did get an education as a woman, taught at university, studied what I wanted back home. Big possibilities, yet bound in one direction of being an architect. Yet here I have learned that I can be multiple things...

As an architect and academician, I was absorbed in my professional bubble, unaware of the broader issues surrounding migration. Being exposed to new experiences here I discovered that I can be an architect and care about nature, care about people, care about justice! This multifaceted version of me is more fulfilling. For example, resettlement. I have lived that. I never got a chance to think about what is the politics behind it. It is still happening in the heart of Addis. What is the meaning of a 'green city' if you are dismantling the community structure which will affect the environment later?

Being here I learned to listen to my own voice, that is empowering. I grew up in a very communal society. Here I faced an individual perspective. It gave me a chance to value what community brings. When you are in it, you don't think about it. I also realized what I missed in the communal. Not giving enough time to your own voice, enough care for yourself. The more you feel content with yourself, the more you find what you can contribute in this world.

Realizing the value of both is core. As a communal society we tend to blame someone who is individualistic like 'you are too selfish, you are not caring about somebody's perspective.' Those things push you down to empower yourself. In the individualistic society you are not supposed to care what people think, you put yourself first. There is so much loneliness. There is always a blame on each side. It is not supposed to be a clash. Both are important, you have to learn how to balance.

As a newcomer there is a lot of things that you have to mold into. This makes you sometimes defensive and angry because you already made a lot of compromises. If it is working both ways there is always room to compromise. If the movement comes from pity rather than needing each other, it will not work. I think what would help it is to go beyond what you think is right. If you expect people should fit in to your individualistic norm you will only get people like you. You will then miss other perspectives. It's just to be open to possibilities and perspectives, this is the connecting piece.

I have evolved yet the core of me didn't change. Here I have learned to take care of myself. If I am not happy, people may be will say 'sorry that you are not happy', but they are not going to live your life. You have to learn how to do that for yourself. I developed more courage to say what I want, without feeling pressure. I have witnessed both sides and became more realistic. I went beyond my bubble and have seen the positive and the negative impact. There is more to learn outside of the bubble. I can't go back now that my horizons have expanded the bubble becomes too small.

The statue of this lion represents home to me. It is close to where I grew up. Here is the national theatre of Ethiopia, here I went for the first time to the cinema, here our parents took us out for cake or ice-cream. The Lion of Judah is symbol of Ethiopian Emperors and Ethiopia. The acacia tree next to the lion is offering shade in the middle of the square where you find a café where people, artists, writers and other citizens meet. Everything is happening here. It feels like home, the root.

