

**STOP
DISCRIMINATION**

A BOOKOSMIA PUBLICATION



It's not ok



A collection of powerful essays
against discrimination
by writers under-17

Illustrated by Pooja Saklani

Bookosmia



Bookosmia is a global movement for kids to feel heard! We believe every child has a story to tell and a unique way to express it as well. We have been rated as the leading destination in India for under-17s to submit their creative work by the fabulous folks at The Himalayan Writers Retreat.

From remote villages in India to Colorado to Munich. From adventurous magical stories to cute butterfly poems to serious essays to beautiful artwork to heartfelt book reviews- we are amazed by it all! With over 1800 unique stories published from writers across 125+ locations globally, till date, we are a safe and preferred destination for kids whether it is to read, listen, write or watch their favourite stories.

MORE ABOUT US AT : [HTTPS://BOOKOSMIA.COM](https://bookosmia.com)

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A note from the publisher



Have you ever gone to eat at a restaurant but have been denied entry because of your last name? Have you been prohibited from going to school because you are a girl? Have people laughed or made fun of you because of your accent? Have you been insulted by a stranger because of your profession? Have you been driven out of your country because of war? Have you been attacked because of the colour of your skin?

If your answer to the above questions is a 'no', we are extremely glad to have connected with you. While most of these points may seem irrelevant to your life, they are a sad reality of many people across the world.

The Indian constitution emphasizes the right to be treated equally and opposes discrimination of any kind but on the ground level, things aren't so simple.

And for that reason, we are proud to present '**It's Not Ok**', a compilation of stunning writings by young writers of Bookosmia who have chosen to use their talents to call out prevailing discrimination in the world. Don't forget to check out the brilliant illustrations by Pooja Saklani, that convey these ideas powerfully while reminding us of the legacy of traditional Indian art!

Essays in focus



Refugee crisis



Bullying



Period Stigma



Racism



Dignity of labour

Editor's note



Dear readers,

Very often, a youngster is called 'just a kid' and ignored when they express an opinion on a world issue. This book is proof why that is unfortunate.

Whether it is calling out the patriarchy, outdated beliefs, discrimination against a person's job, bullying, to indifference towards refugees, these youngsters tell it as it is.

And through these passionate voices, comes a reminder. The youth is watching us. And we better pull up our socks and give them the future they deserve to inherit.

We hope this book moves you and speaks to you as it has to us. More power to the youth!

Foreword



Gaurang Raval

**Change maker, Ashoka Fellow,
Clinton Fellowship awardee**

“

I am extremely inspired and amazed with your work. Each and every piece has so much of depth and they leave multiple questions. Kindly convey my deepest appreciation and acknowledgment for the courage these little friends have expressed.

Many congratulations to you and your team.

”

Gaurang Raval is a co-founder of Sauhard who has been working on youth development and conflict transformation work since 2005. Gaurang is also an Ashoka fellow and was awarded Clinton Fellowship (2013), Change Looms leadership fellowship (2012) and Open Space fellowship (2011). Gaurang is a passionate theatre enthusiast who has written and directed various plays and mimes. Gaurang has also directed documentaries and short films on various social issues.

Appreciation from an art evangelist



Yosha Gupta

Change maker, art evangelist, serial entrepreneur

“

I love how the Bookosmia team has used traditional art and patterns from Bhil art to make these important stories against discrimination even more powerful. Traditional art and artists also face a lot of discrimination and marginalisation, so its only fitting how beautifully traditional art has been used here to amplify the voices of these young writers against discrimination.

”

Yosha Gupta is a Hong Kong based serial entrepreneur. She is Founder & CEO of MeMeraki on a mission to revive traditional and folk arts with modern contemporary fashion wearable art, storytelling and technology.



Quest for home, away from home

By Rehan Sheikh, 12

International Refugee Day is observed by UNESCO to honour the courage, strength, bravado and determination of people who are forced to flee their homeland under the threats of conflicts and violence.

Many of us probably do not know that Delhi is home to several refugees and asylum seekers - mostly Somalis, Syrians, Afghans, Burmese et al who are registered with UNHCR in India. Here is the story of one such refugee, Samin.



Samín seems inconsolable when asked about his family. A refugee from Syria, he lives alone in Delhi. While talking about his past the profound pain was apparent on his face. Still, he is willing to talk about his past.

“I am Samin from Syria. When I was just 21, my parents died one after another within a span of six months, leaving me practically lost and heartbroken. There was no one except me to look after my sister, so I took a job in a nearby restaurant.



Things started off well but soon took a turn for the worse. The country descended into civil war as rebel brigades were formed to battle government forces for control of cities, towns and the countryside.

Several people started fleeing the civil war between President Bashar Al-Assad's government and the rebels, as well as extremist groups.

One morning, I along with with my sister went to the nearby market. Suddenly a roar shook the entire market place. It was an intense bomb blast which hit the entire market and its nearby places.

While remaining down on the ground, I lifted my head up and looked around to find everything completely changed. Almost all the shops had been mangled and tossed around. I suddenly realized my sister was not there beside me. I searched for her here and there among all the dead and injured. I found her, yes. But amongst the debris. I lost my only sister.

The bomb had destroyed all the adjacent buildings, one of which was my house.

All my neighbours decided to flee the brutal conflict in Syria and the repressive government and decided to start the perilous journey across the Mediterranean into Europe. It was then my old friend Emnauel suggested that it would be better to move to India as India has been a host to a small group of refugees who sought to avoid the crowded countries that share the borders with Syria or the perilous sea journey to Europe.

India is one of very few countries where we still have a Syrian embassy.

So Emnauel and I took visa and came here,” Samin shared his dreadful past.

Initially, Samin and Emnael had to struggle here as they used to face discrimination.

Even after facing several hurdles, refugees live with the dream of going back to their own country.



We must all remember that a refugee is someone who is forced to leave their country and we must also realize that no one in the world would willingly leave their home and homeland unless they are forced to do so.

About the writer



Rehan Sheikh, 12 from Kolkata

Rehan has been writing since childhood. Recently he won the Elan Middle School writing contest. His works have been published in Storyweaver, Elan, and Thinkly. Rehan's meaningful write up on refugees indicates a very mature mindset and was republished by the international Borderless Journal.



End the stigma. Period.

By Laksha Khanna, 13

Radhika a chirpy teenager, entered puberty. As she was dealing with the physical changes her body underwent, she was hit by a tsunami of blood in her pants.

Life was never the same thereafter.

There was a one-hour lecture on the do's and don'ts, the rules and rituals to be followed. Most of these were totally meaningless and could not be justified, even by her mom.



She was told to just follow them, without asking any questions. Soon this bubbly child was sitting in a corner, watching her friends play as she had strict instructions from her mother to not be jumping and running around 'this time.'

Her friends were constantly trying to bring her to play with them, but an embarrassed Radhika kept making lame excuses, feeling as though she would transfer some deadly disease to her friends.



The next bout hit her just before her board exams. As she was about to go to the temple to pray as she had done for every exam before, her mom came running after her, forbidding her to enter the temple or pray since it was ‘that time of the month.’ Radhika, who as a child was often referred to as Lakshmi and Durga, suddenly became impure.

So, the gods also know when not to bless a girl child?

The all-grown-up Radhika was now getting married. She was so looking forward to a new life, a new beginning.

Prakash returned from work one evening with the news that his parents were moving in with them. Prakash's parents were traditional but loving and Radhika liked having them around. Soon her monthly calendar ticked. Radhika was put on the radar once again. A new set of unheard rules followed.

Now, every month Radhika was treated like an outcast in the family. She wasn't allowed to sit on the sofa or enter the kitchen. She had to use a separate set of utensils for eating, which were to be washed by her separately.



Once Prakash got home some of his colleagues, while Radhika was menstruating. Neither Prakash nor his family had answers for his friends when they constantly asked Radhika to sit next to them. She wasn't even allowed to serve her guests water!

Our Indian society is like the two headed Janus, one which tries to bring women up and talk about empowerment while the other which pulls women down in the name of myths and traditions.

What kind of discrimination is this?

About the writer



Laksha Khanna, 13 from Kolkata

Laksha is passionate about writing from a very early age. She has won various creative writing competitions in school and elsewhere. Apart from writing, she is very fond of dramatics. She really enjoys being on the stage and performing for an audience. Laksha is a student of Sushila Birla Girls School, Kolkata and is mentored by Word Munchers. Laksha's powerful write up was republished at the award winning Countercurrents.org

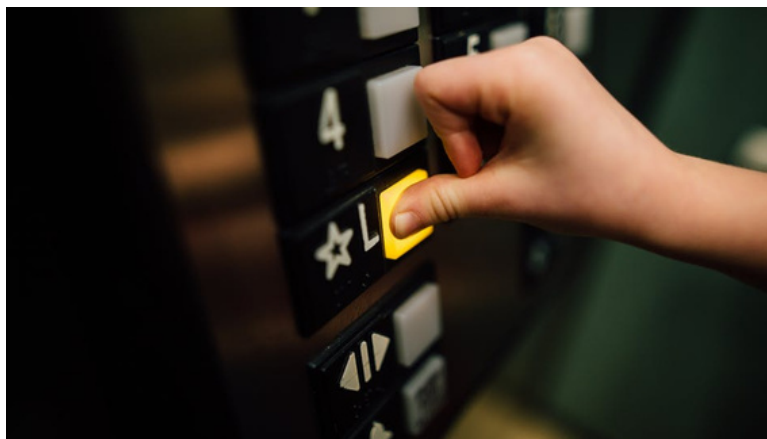


A lift from reality

By Diya Barmecha, 14

This day was like any other.

What else can you expect from the life of a security guard at a common building?



Right on time, the seventh-floor lady exited the lift on the far right. Soon after, out came the second-floor kids. I used to be able to see their big smiles. Now they have their masks, and they have orders to stay away from me.

Now I am no longer their friend.

As the night came closer, the lift barely opened, and I was left alone with my thoughts as I drifted off to sleep. I was awoken by a ring from flat 603.

As I picked up the lift phone, I heard a voice scream, “Please come fast, uncle!”

The 603 owners usually liked to play pranks on me and called me to waste my time, but I had a duty to fulfill.

I called the lift and tapped my feet anxiously. The first lift that came was the one on the far right. I knew that it was not the one in which people like me were allowed. But I had to go!

In a few seconds, I had reached the sixth floor. Standing right outside the door, the flat owner said, “I was just kidding! This never gets old! And what were you thinking coming in the residents’ lift? There is a separate lift for outsiders. Do you have the money and status to be in the same lift as us? Answer me!”

I spent the rest of the night looking at the concrete walls, thinking about what I had done.

I didn't have the status or the money to get into that lift. People fear the Coronavirus and they know that those who have money, have means to be safe.

But me? I am just a security guard.



About the writer



Diya Barmecha, 14 from Mumbai

Diya loves reading and subjects like math and science because they seem logical. She enjoys watching movies and learning more about the world. She likes to understand people's opinions on various things like religion and culture even if she doesn't agree with them. Diya's wonderful essay was republished by the award winning Countercurrents.org. She goes to Ascend International School and is a student of Word Munchers.



**Blowing out
someone
else's candle
doesn't
make yours
shine better**

By Aishwarya Gupta, 15

Don't hurt anyone's feelings, always respect girls, be nice to everyone, treat others with respect, behave with others as if they are your brothers and sisters!"- This advice is passed on from generation to generation.

Are these merely words?



Nowadays, we enjoy teasing people, laughing at them for their mistakes, making fun of them and abusing them. Abuses have now become a part of our conversation. Without that we feel somewhat incomplete.

We like ‘roasting’ people without any reason, and this has become the most important means of entertainment. We don’t think about their feelings. We forget that they are also humans and we treat them worse than animals.

Is all this right? Are we on the right path?
No, not at all!

According to a survey in India, 42% of children are bullied at school. These are the reported cases.

Just imagine yourself in the other person's place and then think how will you feel? If you feel that this kind of behavior is not acceptable for you, then stop it for others. Those who don't insult anyone but still laugh at someone, instead of taking an immediate action, also are complicit in bullying.

If you don't know how someone feels when he or she is bullied, then listen- they are so badly affected that they are not able to interact with people. They think so much about the incident that these things take them towards depression. They become self-conscious and insecure about themselves, all because someone wanted a few laughs.

If you think that you are getting bullied by someone, then immediately share your feelings with your teacher, parents, siblings, or talk to any counselor. Don't feel that they will not understand you. They will, because they have seen the world more than you. Don't feel scared of anyone, if they make fun of you.

Remember the good qualities that define you. Don't ever bully others or be bullied by someone.

Always remember one thing- Blowing out someone's candle does not make yours shine better.



About the writer



Aishwarya Gupta, 15 from Rudrapur

Aishwarya is a 15-year-old, class 9th student currently hosting a show which is a podcast called 'Make A Change.' She is a YouTuber, podcaster and a blogger. She is a student at Delhi Public School. Aishwarya's thoughtful essay was republished by the award-winning Countercurrents.org.



Racism is not only an American problem

By Shivam Periwal, 15

Many years ago, the world saw mass bloodshed unravel in the form of World Wars. Many people died fighting with other countries for equality, but they were oblivious to the morbid reality of their own country.



There was an uproar in mercenaries killing the civilians. The thing that they didn't consider, was the harm that would fall upon their own country.

It could cause deaths and unlimited sacrifices. The rich would get richer and the poor would become poorer.

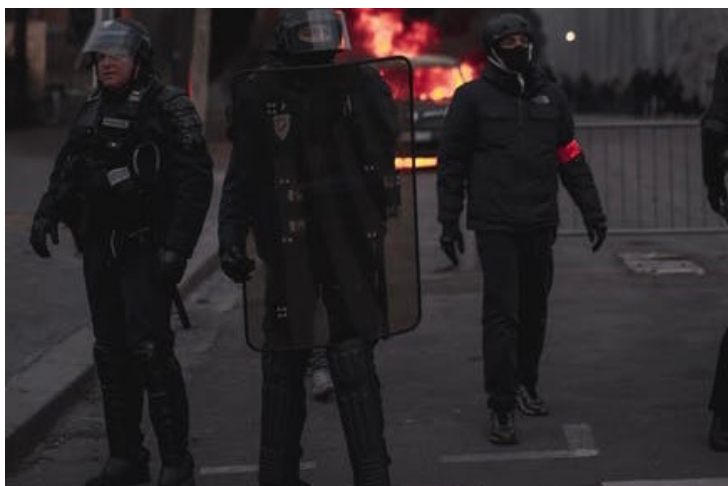
Years before that, the world saw an increase in slavery as African Americans were oppressed and forced into becoming slaves for the rich, in order to prevent their children to go to sleep hungry.

There came a day when the African Americans had had enough and began their journey to freedom. People who were victims of racism wanted just one thing, justice.

Everybody was scared and there was nothing one could do. You could either take part in the protest or stay inside your house under the bed or in some sort of bunker. Stores were broken into and small businesses were affected greatly.

One day all that vanished, when the innocent people who didn't want war, took a stand. The merciless war ended, and unity started to grow. There was harmony and brotherhood and now people started to think about others. People of all color, caste and creed were treated as equals.

Now again, the issue has come up due to the recent case of George Floyd who was killed brutally in the US by the police, because of his colour. As a teenager it makes me sad to see the unjust killings in every nook and corner of the world.



The worst affected would be the children learning about racism and its disadvantages. They would feel sorry for this world. And deep down in their hearts they would get the sense of feeling that someday at any given point of time, they might suffer because of racism too.

Instead of having conversations about happy memories, parents must tell their kids how to protect themselves if they are targeted because of their colour.



This can discourage the children and make them feel scared and insecure within themselves.

I write about it today because this is a world issue, not just an American one.

It is relevant to India too because after all we are a diverse country and despite our differences, of colour, religion, language and caste, we all must live together and in harmony at the end of the day.

We must stay united and beat discrimination to its deepest core or else it would change the future of this world.



About the writer



Shivam Periwal, 15 from Kolkata

Shivam is a passionate writer and tries to achieve new goals through hard work and dedication. Loved by all friends, he also tries to meet new people and get to know about their interests and hobbies as well as try to adapt their good habits. Shivam's thoughtful essay on racism was selected to be republished by the international journal, Borderless. Shivam studies in La Martiniere for boys and learns creative writing at Word Munchers.

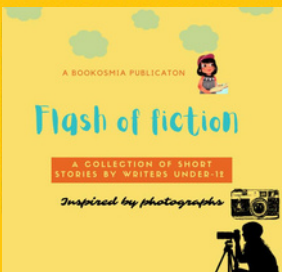
A note to the reader



Liked the essays? We are sure you have your opinions on these and other important topics too.

So what are you waiting for? Pen your thoughts down, send them to **sara@bookosmia.com** and get published on Bookosmia, the pioneering platform for youngsters to feel heard. Plus a chance to be featured on our acclaimed podcast! Write to us today!

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