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REPEAT AFTER ME: I AM INVINCIBLE!

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Abstract

This vignette narrates a story and discusses how the issue of culture and identity can impact the life of an individual. The memoir showcases the journey of an immigrant in the United States and explains the intricacies of working in a multicultural and diverse environment. It narrates a few real-life conversations and instances, which often trigger despair and loneliness. It is obvious such thin personal experiences would make the day-to-day struggle rugged and appalling. However, as an 'austere survivor,' this memoir ends with the inspiring story to 'thrive and be a champion.' Needless to mention, this memoir is a powerful story of a woman of color in academia who celebrates everyday as 'I am invincible.'

Keywords: Austere survivor, Immigrants, invincible, United States

Repeat After Me: I am invincible!

Malcolm Gladwell said, "who we are cannot be separated from where we're from?" This is so true. My journey as an Indian/Asian immigrant in the United States has taught me the most important lesson of how 'culture and identity' works in this country. These two components form a "contact zone," where, as an immigrant, I experience new identity issues and must

adjust my own cultural practices to those of the latter. I have always felt everyone has a story to tell and I am not an exception. On the one hand, I am pleased to see people appreciating my talent, humility, empathy, however, at the same time, I come across people who are always ready to call out on me as the "Indian with a dot," "a go-getter," suggesting me to "keep my head down and

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work, or even talking about my Indo-British accent.

When I first embarked on an academic career, I understood the intricacies of working in a multicultural and diverse environment. Having said that, I also understand the pitfalls of adopting a “one size fits all,” approach in such an environment. However, these days, I only feel despair and loneliness, and I struggle every day to understand the reason behind it. Is it because of ‘who I am?’ I have wonderful colleagues and friends who appreciate me, and make me smile, however, there are a few who would never leave out an opportunity to humiliate me as a BIPOC.

I believe the success of an institution of higher learning depends on our ability to embrace, value, and appreciate the diversity of everyone. We need to realize different perspectives and experiences enhance the richness of ideas and creativity. I believe in a culturally diverse, open, and

inclusive environment all of us can rise and shine. So, each time I try to communicate because I believe communication is the key to success. However, every time, I feel disappointed, invisible, and inaudible. I look forward to that day, when we will ask ourselves the question what does it mean to embrace diversity and inclusion in academia? It has been proven time and again that institutions with higher levels of ethnic and gender diversity not only thrive well but also perform better than others. Hence, diversity is but ONE aspect of the equation, followed by another important aspect that is inclusion.

I strongly believe that a diverse and inclusive team will always come up with better solutions to problems, successful ideas, better products, and ultimately more satisfied employees. I look forward to that day. Until then, I will keep celebrating the differences and repeat after myself, ‘I am invincible.’