

The Girl Who Lost Her Country



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Neha's Travels

I'm

falling,

falling,

falling!

Jerk!

Gasp!

Why do I always land with a jerk?

Every single time! I know it's a dream, but it still terrifies me.

I feel out of breath. I don't open my eyes.

I can feel a cold sweat all over my body. I then feel a steady pattering on my cheeks. Wet. Had I left the window open?

My hand scrunches up the sheet, but it crumbles into a million grains and slips through my fingers. Is that sand of some sort?

A hand jostles my shoulders. "Wake up" says a strange voice.

Raindrops fall on my face and bicycles whizz past. I am outside. Everything is strange and it's a little cold. I have never been here before.

I close my eyes. I must still be dreaming.

“Wake up!” The voice persists.

I cautiously open my eyes.

A boy, who is very fair and has blond hair, is staring at me. He must be about 12 years old, like me.

He looks as surprised as I feel. But he has good manners. He straightens up and says, “welcome to the **Netherlands!** I am **Lucas!**”

THE NETHERLANDS IS A COUNTRY IN EUROPE AND ITS NAME CAN LITERALLY BE TRANSLATED AS “LOWER COUNTRY” BECAUSE OF ITS LOW AND FLAT LAND. IN FACT, SOME PARTS OF THE NETHERLANDS ARE ACTUALLY BELOW SEA LEVEL



I manage a feeble “hi I’m **Neha**, from **Nepal!**”, followed by “how did I get here?”

He looks perplexed and shrugs his shoulders.

We are in a small park, across the street from a row of houses. I stare mesmerised at the many cyclists travelling along. We both laugh when a man, looking at his phone, walks onto a special path for the bicycles and a chorus of bells startles him. He leaps back like a frog!

Lucas finally says, “come on, let’s go inside”.

I’m glad to get out of the rain. We cross the road and he knocks on the door of one of the houses. A little girl opens it, his sister, **Linde**.

“So you are from Nepal, and you don’t know how you got here to the Netherlands?”

I shake my head.

Silence.

I can see that Lucas is puzzling this all out in his head, eyebrows furrowed as he concentrates hard. I myself feel too dazed to do anything or think clearly.

He finally straightens up and says “I think I might know what brought you

here! You may not believe me though”. I guess my look says, “try me”! He puts his hand into his pocket and pulls out a coin. “Recognise this?” It’s a Two **Rupee** coin from Nepal.

“I am a money collector... I mean, I collect coins” stutters Lucas. “I love to travel, and my coins are from some of the amazing places I have been to, or would love to go to.

THE RUPEE IS THE TYPE OF “CURRENCY” OR MONEY USED IN NEPAL AND SOME OTHER SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA AND SRI LANKA.





I've always wanted to go to Nepal, to climb the **Himalayas** and see the **Yeti!**"

"Now here's the crazy part. I wanted to go there so badly that I took this coin and held it in my palm and wished really, really hard to be able to see Nepal. Now you won't believe this, but when I opened my eyes, *puff*, you appeared!"

"I know it sounds crazy, right?"

I don't know what to say. His story *does* sound crazy. But how on earth had I ended up in the Netherlands, so far away from home?

Lucas then says something very wise. "My grandmother always told me that if something unexpected happens, it is for a good reason. I really wanted to travel and made a wish with my coin. But my coin brought you here instead. So, maybe, you need to travel more than I do!"

THE HIMALAYAS ARE THE TALLEST MOUNTAIN RANGE IN THE WORLD. THEY ARE IN INDIA, NEPAL, BHUTAN, CHINA AND PAKISTAN. THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN ON EARTH, MOUNT EVEREST, IS IN BOTH NEPAL AND TIBET. THE YETI OR 'ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN' IS A CREATURE FROM FOLKLORE WHO SUPPOSEDLY LIVES IN THE HIMALAYAS. THEY SAY HE IS LIKE AN APE, BUT BIGGER.





Do I need to travel?

I am very happy at home in Nepal.

Or am I?

It all comes back to me now...

I had been at school with my Mom and elder sister Nikita. Mom was really upset, she kept telling the teacher that Nikita and I are Nepali, we were born there and had never even set foot outside the country. But the teachers were

just shaking their heads. Miss Bhattarai wouldn't look my Mom in the eye. She stared at the ground saying "I am sorry **Didi**, but Nikita cannot sit her exams without showing proof of nationality."

Seeing my mother like this, I felt helpless. My mind immediately went

to the other times I've seen her really unhappy like this. There was that time she was speaking to the rude man in the government office, trying to keep calm while she explained that my father was not there. Or the time when the judge in the court asked her a strange question about morals, which she did not answer.

My Mom loves us more than I thought was possible. She does everything for us. I could not bear seeing her like this. And worse, I could not bear to think that it had something to do with us.

Things went blurry and I felt dizzy. There was a sharp ringing sound in my ears. I could see people moving their lips but couldn't hear them.

My legs went wobbly and my eyelids closed.

The last thing I saw was Mom's feet.



I tell Lucas what happened. My last memory from Nepal. I tell him all the questions that I had spinning in my head at the time. "Why can't Nikita sit her exam? Will I also not be allowed? Is that why Mom was so upset? What is a nationality? Is everyone supposed to have one?"

He furrows his brow in the now familiar way. I feel like I've known him for much longer than a few minutes!

'DIDI' IS A FRIENDLY WORD USED IN NEPAL BY WOMEN TO ADDRESS OTHER WOMEN. IT MEANS 'OLDER SISTER'.



“I think a nationality is your origin, and where you are from. For example, if you are born in Germany then your origin is German. I think everyone has a nationality, because everyone has an origin. Everyone has a place they are from.”

Linde, who had been silently listening to this all, then chips in: “hmm, nationality is the language you speak. I speak Dutch so I know I’m from the Netherlands. I have a bus card to get from my home to school and that has my name on it. So that probably proves I have Dutch nationality.”

That makes me think.

I know I am from Nepal, I speak Nepali, so I must have Nepali nationality. But I also know Mom is having difficulty proving our nationality. And we don’t have bus cards in Nepal!

“That’s it! Your mission is to find your nationality!”

Lucas runs to his room and comes back with a little purse. “I keep my most precious coins here” he says. “Take it. I think the coin brought you here for a reason. I think that the coins will take you to places, so you can meet new people and learn about nationality. Take out a coin, squeeze it tightly, close your



eyes and make a wish. I think each coin will take you back to its own country. Find out more about nationality. Have a great adventure. And remember to tell us all about it!”

Linde then scrambles through her school bag and pulls out a notebook. “Here you go Neha! You can write your adventures and the answers to your questions in this book!”

QUESTION 1

WHAT IS A NATIONALITY? DOES EVERYBODY GET THE NATIONALITY OF THE COUNTRY WHERE THEY WERE BORN?

Okay so nationality seems to be where you are from and what language you speak. It seems like everyone has a nationality. But if this is true, why does my sister have problems?

I am so grateful. They are so nice. I thank them and hug them. I take the notebook and coins. I promise to let them know what happens. I close my eyes, pull out a random coin, clutch it close to my chest and make a wish.



There’s a nice breeze, but boy is it hot! I can hear a bird singing... no I shouldn’t call it singing, it’s more like a shout or a shriek. “Caw-caw, caw-caw”. I unclench my fist and I see 10 Rupees. But this

is not Nepal. There are also two other languages engraved on the coin, that I can’t read. I turn the coin round and see I am in **Sri Lanka**. Then I see it. The sea!

I have never seen the sea before. It’s huge and it keeps on moving, but it doesn’t go anywhere. I’m mesmerised.

Two girls jump in front of me and break my stare. They are sisters. Kenolee is nine years old and Kithmi is 10. We go and sit in the sand on the beach.

SRI LANKA IS A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND IN SOUTH ASIA. IT IS SOMETIMES CALLED THE PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN. SRI LANKA WAS ONCE RULED BY PORTUGAL AND THE NETHERLANDS AND THEN BRITAIN. IT FINALLY GAINED INDEPENDENCE IN 1948. OVER 20 MILLION PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS AND RELIGIONS LIVE IN THE COUNTRY.



The buildings of **Colombo** – the capital city - are behind us.

I tell them my story. Kithmi thinks for a long time when I ask her “what is a nationality”. She then says, “nationality is the different types of cultures and traditions and religions and different types of people in the world”. Kenolee butts in, “not just that **Akki**. Like, erm, it means you have a... it’s like a place. It’s like a country you were born in, and the rules you follow. Like, my nationality is Sri Lankan so I need to follow the rules. Yeah. That’s what it is.”

Kenolee goes on to say she knows she has Sri Lankan nationality “because I have been told that I have it. Plus you can feel what your nationality is. Like an energy. For example, you can feel you are Sri Lankan, or English, or American... like the energy that your body gives you. Oh, and plus, your skin colour.”

I think about this. I tell Kithmi and Kenolee that I feel Nepali, I am part of the culture and I sometimes feel that “energy”. I also look like other Nepali people so I

don’t understand why my mother cannot prove we are Nepali. Kithmi shrugs her shoulders.

“Grownups can be weird” she says. I laugh in agreement, but I think she notices my sadness. She hugs me and says, “everyone has to have a nationality. Everyone has a homeland.” We chat for a while and play catch on the beach. I then sadly tell them I should go. Kithmi tells me to wait a minute. She runs to her bag and returns with a small black object. “This is my travel camera - you can take 12 pictures with it. Use it wisely!”

**AKKI MEANS
'OLDER SISTER'
IN SINHALESE.**

**WHAT ARE SOME
OF THE RULES IN
YOUR COUNTRY?
(THESE ARE
ALSO CALLED
LAWS)**



QUESTION 2

DOES EVERYBODY GET A NATIONALITY IF THEY FOLLOW THE CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND RULES OF THE COUNTRY THEY LIVE IN?

massive statue of a man riding a horse. Sitting on the wall of the fountain is a short woman. She looks to be the same age as my Mom and wears a colourful scarf around her face just like Mom does when we go for long walks in the forest near our house. “**T’aves baxtalo**” she says with a wide smile. I spot some

‘T’AVES BAXTALO’ MEANS ‘WELCOME’ IN THE ROMANI LANGUAGE. CAN YOU RESEARCH THE WORD FOR ‘WELCOME’ IN FIVE OTHER LANGUAGES?



her life but has only been living in Skopje, the capital city, for the last ten years. Roma people are one of Europe’s oldest and largest **ethnic minorities** she tells me. They face many difficulties in life. People can be very mean to them and judge them. This reminds me of people in Nepal who are treated very badly. Like the **Dalits**.

Kezia is very kind. Perhaps this is because she knows how it feels when people are unkind to her. She says that she too is struggling to prove she and her

I’m in a very ornate town square. There appear to be statues everywhere. Perhaps more than there are people! They all seem to be of big muscular men, riding horses or fighting with swords. I have never seen anything like it.

The coin I have in my hand says something in a language and script I do not understand. I have no clue where I am! The sun is beaming down and I am drawn to the huge water fountain in the middle of the square. There is a very tall pillar in the middle of the fountain and on it, a

missing teeth. “Welcome to Skopje, **Macedonia**”. I remember studying about Macedonia in my history lessons. Isn’t this where Alexander the Great was from? Perhaps that’s why there are so many statues!

Kezia introduces herself to me, she tells me she is a Romani woman and has seven young children, three sons and four daughters. She has lived in Macedonia all





family are from the country they were born in.

“Except for my youngest daughter, none of my children have been registered. I have six undocumented children. I gave birth to my youngest daughter in hospital, that’s why she was registered. I gave birth to the others at home, that’s why they are not registered.”

“If one of my children gets ill or hurt, I always have to beg the doctors at the hospital to treat them for free, because I have no money to pay. I think that if my children had birth certificates they would treat us much better.”

Kezia says that **birth registration** is important to show that her children were born in Macedonia. If her children grow

DALIT PEOPLE ARE CONSIDERED TO BE A LOWER 'CASTE'. THE CASTE SYSTEM IS A WAY PEOPLE MARK DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VARIOUS GROUPS. IN THE OLD DAYS, YOUR CASTE WAS BASED ON THE JOB YOU DID. BUT NOW, IT IS OFTEN JUST USED TO TREAT SOME PEOPLE AS MORE IMPORTANT, AND OTHERS AS LESS IMPORTANT. THE WORD 'DALIT' MEANS 'OPPRESSED' IN THE ANCIENT SANSKRIT LANGUAGE. MANY DALIT PEOPLE ARE STILL TREATED BADLY, EVEN THOUGH IT IS AGAINST THE LAW TO DO SO.

AN ETHNIC MINORITY IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOME DIFFERENCES FROM THE MAIN POPULATION IN A COUNTRY. THESE COULD BE A DIFFERENT CULTURAL TRADITION, RELIGION, LANGUAGE, PLACE OF ORIGIN OR EVEN SKIN COLOUR. SOMETIMES, MINORITIES ARE TREATED BADLY FOR NO GOOD REASON.

WHEN AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN? WAS YOUR BIRTH REGISTERED? DO YOU KNOW WHERE OR HOW THIS WAS DONE?? ASK YOUR PARENT OR CARER TO SHOW YOU YOUR BIRTH CERTIFICATE. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE AND WHAT IS WRITTEN ON IT?



up without birth registration they may never receive Macedonian nationality. She tells me that there are millions of children all over the world who cannot receive a nationality. “When no country will accept a child as their national, then that child is **stateless**.”

I feel a little dizzy as the word “stateless” circles around in my mind. Are Nikita and I stateless?

State-less?

Without a state?

Without a country?

Is this possible?

Kezia explains why she has never had Macedonian nationality herself. “My mother did not have money for hospital fees when I was born. And so, the hospital did not give her the papers confirming my birth. My birth was never registered. Maybe she could have fought for my nationality in the government offices - I wish she had demanded it. But she could not read or write and going to those places, full of people with serious faces and expensive clothing was scary for my mother. I understand that now. I too never had the

chance to go to school and I don’t have the confidence to demand my rights from people more educated and more powerful than me.”

She tells me that many parents pass down secret family recipes to their children, or give them money or a house to live in, but all she has passed on to her children is an uncertain future. “My children will inherit statelessness from me. I cannot get a job because I do not have an identity card. I collect plastic bottles and cardboard to make some money. I want my children to receive a nationality and live a better life than me.”

I can feel a lump in my throat as Kezia talks. There are also tears in her eyes. She takes photos out of her handbag to show me her beautiful children. I take

a picture of one of her photographs. It's two of her sons staring into the camera. They look pretty cool, and also a little cheeky. I think that if I met them, I would like them.



After some time passes, the sun starts to set. We hug each other and say goodbye. She wishes me well. I say I will keep her family in my heart.

I feel my stomach drop as it hits me, I think I am a stateless person.

I wonder if my birth was registered, and I also wonder if birth registration alone is enough to prove where I belong.

I go through my now familiar coin ritual, shaking the purse before I pick one out. I wonder where I will be taken next.



A beautiful, kind, warm face is looking down at me. I learn that it belongs to Rosa, and I am in the **Dominican Republic**. In my hand is a one **Peso** coin. We are sitting on white plastic chairs under

QUESTION 3

**IS IT YOUR BIRTH
CERTIFICATE THAT GIVES
YOU A NATIONALITY?**

THE ISLAND OF HISPANIOLA IS SHARED BY TWO COUNTRIES: THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND HAITI. IT IS LOCATED IN THE CARIBBEAN BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA. SINCE THE 1930'S, PEOPLE IN HAITI WERE ENCOURAGED TO CROSS THE BORDER AND TO WORK IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC CUTTING SUGAR CANE.



the shade of a tree. Next to me are three little girls. Rosa tells me they are ten, eight and three. They are playing “elastics” together (a game in which you jump in figures on and off two elastics stretched around a tree).

I tell her my story, and how I fear I may be stateless. Rosa reaches towards me and squeezes my two knees affectionately. “Neha, you are so welcome my dear. I would like to share our story with you. Maybe in the future you will tell it to someone else. I will be happy when more people know about us, who have been made stateless.”

Rosa tells me that she used to have the nationality of the Dominican Republic but that it was taken away from her a few years ago. “Yes sweetie, some people are born stateless and will try all their lives



to get a nationality. But others, like us, once had a nationality which was taken away. You see, the government made a new rule in 2013 that children or grandchildren of **immigrants** from Haiti, who could not show certain documents, would not be Dominican citizens, even though they had been born in the Dominican Republic.

The older, better rule, was that anyone born in the Dominican Republic had Dominican nationality. So this change was very confusing and unfair.”

“My own father moved to the Dominican Republic from **Haiti** when he was nineteen. He worked in the fields, cutting sugarcane. He worked really hard and made a new life for himself here. He met my mother at a dance and married her. He was a beautiful caring man who worked hard to make sure we had school books and could get the education he never got. His heart would break if he were alive today and knew his granddaughters and I are no longer accepted here, the place he considered home. He would feel sick to know that without nationality his granddaughters can no longer go to school. I haven’t even been allowed to register the birth of my youngest daughter! When I gave birth to her in the hospital they wouldn’t give me her birth certificate. Yesterday, someone told my eldest daughter to ‘go home’ when she was on the bus. My eyes filled with tears when she asked me ‘Mom, why don’t they want us? What did we do?’ We haven’t done anything wrong but there is a lot of racism and **discrimination** here. In the Dominican Republic, people whose ancestors were from Haiti are treated badly. They say we have darker skin and we are poor and dirty and we don’t belong. It is very hurtful. My whole life I have been Dominican. This is what I am. I have never even been to Haiti.”

“What will you do?” I ask Rosa. She pauses, her brown eyes sparkling. She glances at her children who are still playing together and giggling, and then she smiles proudly. “We will fight for our nationality dear. We have been making films and plays to raise awareness about this bad law and what it is

AN IMMIGRANT IS A PERSON WHO MOVES TO A DIFFERENT COUNTRY TO LIVE THERE.

DISCRIMINATION IS TREATING SOMEONE UNFAIRLY BECAUSE YOU THINK THEY ARE DIFFERENT IN SOME WAY. IT IS UNKIND AND WRONG TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST OTHERS, BECAUSE THEY ARE FROM A MINORITY, OR THEY HAVE A DISABILITY OR THEY ARE GIRLS.



like living without a nationality. Having a nationality is our right, and we will continue to protest in the street until our voices are heard and we have our nationality back.”

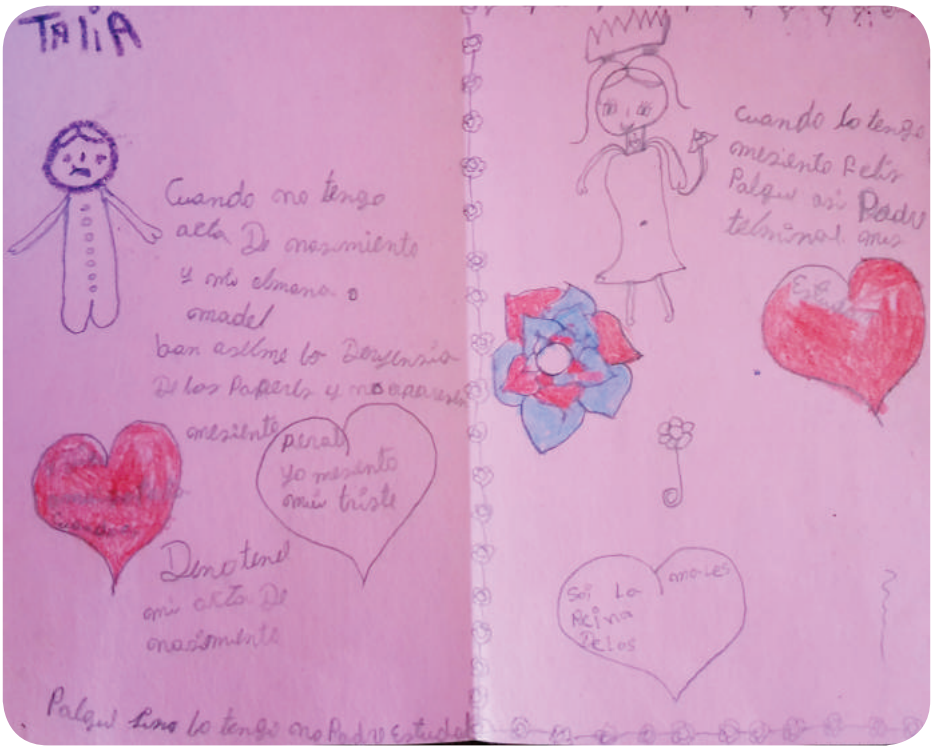
She is such a brave, wise and kind woman. I take a picture of her children, who by now have been joined by some other kids as well. They are all very special. I then join the kids and play with them. Rosa gives us fresh coconut water



to drink, it barely touches my lips as I gulp it down in the tropical heat.

Just before I leave, Rosa’s daughter Talia hands me a beautiful drawing on pink paper (you can see it on the next page).

Rosa explains: “on the left, Talia shows how she feels. ‘When I do not have a birth certificate and my sister or mother go to run errands to try to get papers and they do not appear, I feel sad. If I don’t have my birth certificate I will not be able to study.’ On the right, she has drawn herself as ‘Queen of Misfortune’ alongside the text ‘when I have it I will feel happy because I will be able to finish my schooling.’”



I am angry that little children all over the world like Talia face such situations. It's not just Nikita and myself. I feel I must learn more and do something to make their lives better!

People can lose their nationality! That just sounds crazy! Rosa's daughters went to school every day until one day that was all taken away from them. That gets me thinking...

I am in a large garden. There are lots of trees, and the ground is patchy, some grass and lots of soil. It clearly is a garden that sees lots of activity! I check the money in my hand. It says 10 Francs. But I'm not in France. In fact, France does not use Francs anymore, it uses Euros. But the money of **Cote d'Ivoire**, which was a former French **colony**, is still called Francs.

QUESTION 4

WHAT KIND OF THINGS ARE CHILDREN WHO DON'T HAVE A NATIONALITY NOT ABLE TO DO?

QUESTION 5

WHY DO PEOPLE WHO
HAVE A NATIONALITY
SOMETIMES LOSE IT?

I think they're doing school work.

"I don't know who my parents are, where I am from or where I was born. I think my parents lost me when I was born, and someone brought me here.



COTE D'IVOIRE WAS ONCE A COLONY OF FRANCE. A COLONY IS A COUNTRY THAT WAS INVADDED AND RULED BY ANOTHER COUNTRY. WHILE UNDER FRENCH RULE, SOME FRENCH PEOPLE SETTLED IN COTE D'IVOIRE. FRANCE HAD ALSO COLONISED NEIGHBOURING BURKINA FASO, AND PEOPLE FROM THERE WERE FORCED TO COME TO COTE D'IVOIRE TO WORK ON PLANTATIONS. AFTER COTE D'IVOIRE BECAME AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY IN 1960, MANY OF THESE PEOPLE ORIGINALLY FROM BURKINA FASO, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS, CONTINUED TO LIVE THERE.

I befriend a little girl called Grace. She is dark skinned, has a cute button nose and her hair is in braids.

"Hi Neha, welcome to the SOS Children's village, welcome to my home."

She shows me around the grounds of the orphanage. Tall palm trees are dotted around the land, and little houses sit on top of bright green grass. Two children run past us playing chase and I notice a group of kids and a woman sitting at a table on the veranda of a house.

I think I am about 12 years old, but I can't be sure."

I think Grace is beautiful, and I take her picture:

Grace explains to me that in Cote d'Ivoire it is very hard to get nationality without your parents' documents. "Ivorians must provide their birth certificate, and the nationality certificate of a parent, as proof of their own nationality. I don't have any of those things Neha and I cannot prove that my parents were Ivorian. They call me a **foundling** and I have heard some grownups say that I am stateless".

"If, one day, I can no longer go to school, I would be very unhappy", she says. "In Cote d'Ivoire stateless people cannot do many things, like working or opening a bank account, they can't own land or even move freely inside the country. My dream is to travel"



FOUNDINGS ARE CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS ARE NOT KNOWN. THEY HAVE BEEN 'FOUND' BY SOMEONE ELSE.

she says, “I would like to explore the capital Abidjan, and discover other countries. I want to become Minister of Finance. I would like to be a powerful woman and help others. That would make me happy.”

This gets me thinking. Shouldn't it be easy for countries to accept children as their nationals, even if they don't have birth certificates? How silly, to say you don't belong, just because you don't have a piece of paper? Where do these countries expect these children to go? What do they expect them to do?

QUESTION 6

WHY CAN'T COUNTRIES MAKE SURE ALL CHILDREN GET A NATIONALITY, EVEN IF THEY DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY WERE BORN OR WHO THEIR PARENTS WERE?

Grace and I sit with the children I spotted earlier, they're still working at the table. Malik, one of the boys hands me the piece of paper he is drawing on. His face is soft but he has a deep, pumpkin seed-shaped scar under his eye which makes me wonder what his life has been like. On his piece of paper is a drawing of people queuing up to register for a nationality card. I really like his picture and take a photograph of it.

I also take pictures of a couple of other really nice paintings that the other kids have drawn.

Malik tells me that he also doesn't know who his parents are. He doesn't remember them. He can't get any kind of identity documents without a father or mother.

I take a piece of paper and some crayons and join in...

Grace and I end the day lying side-by-side swinging in an old hammock. We are eating slices of melon and examining each other's art. I apologise for leaving a smudge stain from my sticky fingers on her drawing. Grace's picture has loads and loads of little dots on it. She runs her hand over the page and explains to me what it means to her.

“Maybe one child without nationality is okay, maybe she finds a family to adopt her and can get nationality from them. But look Neha, this is all of us,





there are thousands and thousands of us, the lost children of Cote d'Ivoire. This place is my home, our home. I... we have never known anywhere else, and I want them to accept us as their children. I will give back so much to this country if I have the chance, if I could just go to school and get a job. We would all do so much, I know we would."

We fall asleep under the stars.



I wake up in a dimly lit path. It is very smelly. There are flies buzzing around and garbage everywhere. It is dawn.

It is cool but I sense it will soon get warm. Once I get accustomed to the light and my surroundings, I notice a thin little child peeping at me. He is bare bodied and wearing an old pair of shorts. He is shy, but curious.

"Hello" I say. He smiles and runs away, so I follow. He is kicking an old plastic bottle as he runs, and when I catch up, he kicks it to me. I kick it back and we both laugh.

"My name is Neha, I'm from Nepal."

He looks down.

"What's your name? Where are you from?"

No response.

I try again. "Where are we?"

"Kutapulong" he says, and when he sees my quizzical look he adds, "Bangladesh".

I look at the coin in my hand, it is a Bangladeshi **Taka**.

"Oh OK. So you are Bangladeshi?"

He looks down and shakes his head.

"Where are you from?" I ask again.

"Myanmar."



“Oh, so you’re Burmese?”

Again he shakes his head. “They call us Bengali, and say we are from Bangladesh. But we are **Rohingya**. We are from Myanmar. That is our home.”

ROHINGYA PEOPLE ARE AN ETHNIC MINORITY WHO HAVE LIVED FOR CENTURIES IN MYANMAR. MYANMAR IS A VERY DIVERSE COUNTRY, WITH PEOPLE FROM MANY ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. HOWEVER, MANY PEOPLE IN MYANMAR DO NOT ACCEPT THE ROHINGYA. THEY ARE NOT RECOGNISED AS NATIONALS OF MYANMAR – THEY ARE STATELESS. THE ROHINGYA ARE TREATED VERY BADLY, PERHAPS WORSE THAN ANY OTHER STATELESS GROUP IN THE WORLD. AND SO, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ROHINGYA HAVE FLED MYANMAR, TO BANGLADESH, MALAYSIA, THAILAND, INDIA, PAKISTAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES.

“So why did you leave?” I ask... half dreading what his answer may be.

“They chased us out” he says. “They burnt our homes and shot at us. It was terrible.”

I am shocked and don’t know what to say.

Luckily, he keeps on talking. “Our village was beautiful. But now it is all burnt. I don’t know if I will ever be able to go back. I’m afraid I will forget it, so every time I close my eyes, I try to remember exactly how it looked and smelt. How can they say that someone who knows exactly how a place looks and feels, is not from there? I don’t understand.”

I am trying to make sense of this. Does he have a nationality or is he stateless? And why had he been chased away from his country? Would that happen to me too?

I ask him if he was the only one who ran away. He beckons to me and takes me to a clearing. It is then that I realise we are on a small hill. He points below. There is a sea of shacks, huts and tents – as far as my eyes could see – all crammed full of people. There must have been gazillions!

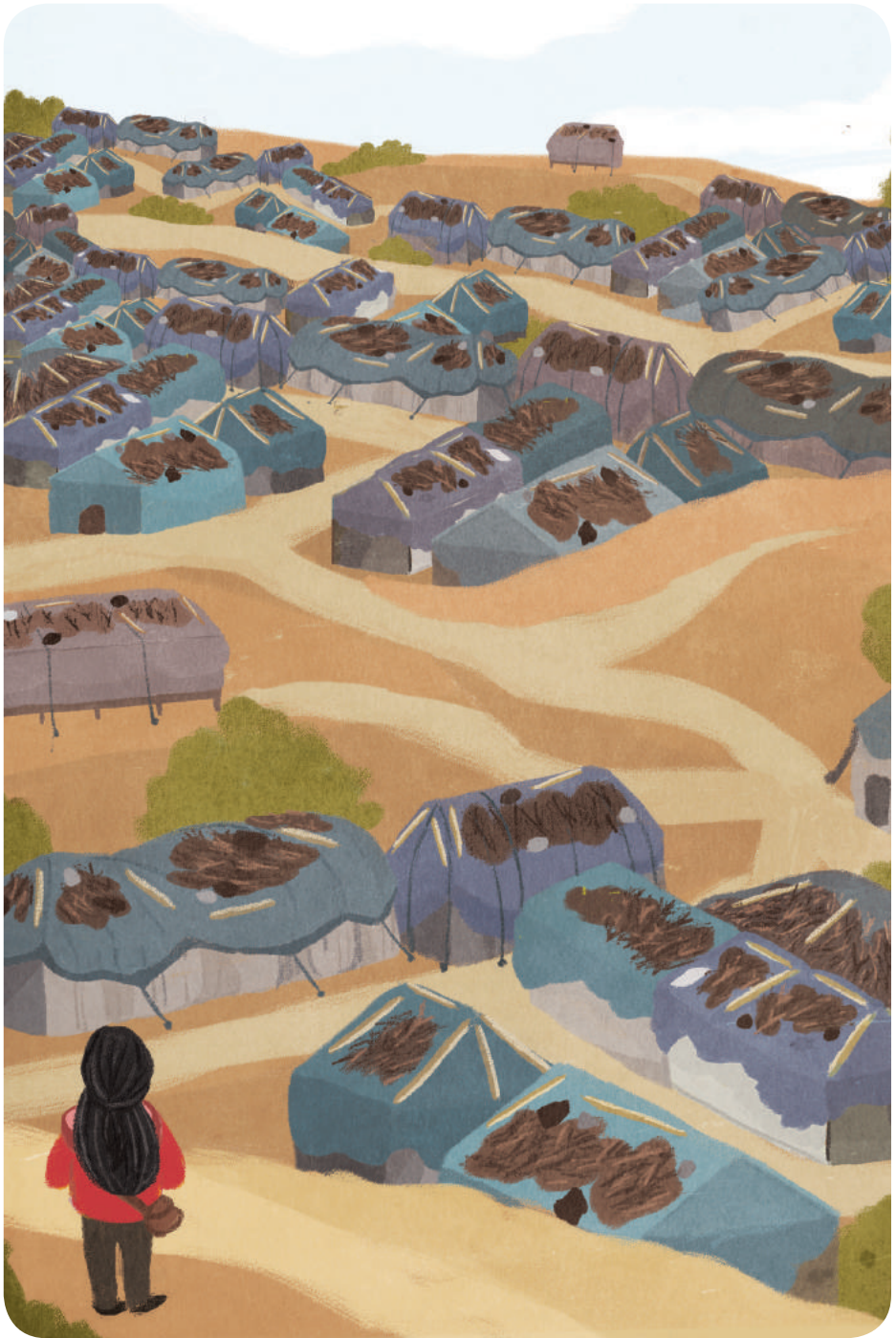
“This is our home now” he says, “because they say we are not from there”.

I feel tears coming into my eyes, but I do not want to make him sad, so I decide to change the subject. “Do you like football?” I ask. “Come let’s play. I will be the goalie”.

Later on, I take his photograph. He has a very beautiful smile.

I take out my notebook and write in it.

After he has left, I realise that I never learnt his name. He is nameless, just like his people, whose name “Rohingya” is not recognised in their own country.



QUESTION 7

WHAT HAPPENS
TO STATELESS PEOPLE
WHO ARE TREATED SO
BADLY THAT THEY HAVE
TO RUN AWAY FROM
THEIR COUNTRY?

I feel very bad. I hope I will see him again, so I can ask.

I close my eyes, open my purse and pull out a coin...



The ground is wobbling underneath me. I feel a little queasy. It takes a little time for me to figure out what's happening. I finally realise that I'm on a long wooden boat that's rocking from side to side. Beside it is another boat, and there's a wooden house,

and another, and another. Some of the boats and houses are linked together by planks of wood, ladders and nets, and there are children running quickly from one to the other. It reminds me of the **slum** neighbourhood in Kathmandu, there are even skinny dogs mooching around. My coin says **Ringgit** and tells me I am in **Malaysia**. I know that not too long ago, Malaysia had the tallest building in the world. But I never knew it had villages built on the sea!





A crowd of children come skipping towards me. I smile nervously and blurt out “I can’t swim”. “It’s okay” says one of the children who is dressed in a ripped and dirty t-shirt and shorts, “we’re professionals”. The other kids laugh. A taller boy says, “we are the Guardians of the Sea and we will protect you”. The shorter boy, Aasif, hands me something that looks like a sausage and tells me to try it, “it’s sea cucumber”. I swallow a bit but my stomach already feels like wobbly jelly and I can’t finish it.

Aasif and the other children tell me that they are **Bajau Laut**. “We live on these boats... and we work here”.

SLUM IS USUALLY THE WORD USED TO DESCRIBE A RUN-DOWN AND OVERCROWDED AREA IN A CITY WHERE POOR PEOPLE LIVE. IT MAY NOT HAVE GOOD FACILITIES SUCH AS TOILETS OR RUNNING WATER AND SO IT CAN BE VERY DIRTY.



MALAYSIA IS A COUNTRY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. IT IS MADE UP OF TWO SIMILARLY SIZED REGIONS, ‘PENINSULAR MALAYSIA’ AND ‘EAST MALAYSIA’ THAT ARE SEPARATED BY THE SOUTH CHINA SEA. MALAYSIA WAS ONCE COLONISED BY THE BRITISH. IT HAS MANY ETHNIC GROUPS, RELIGIONS AND CULTURES. THE FOOD IN MALAYSIA IS GREAT!





“You *work* here?” I ask. “Yes we have to help our parents, we don’t go to school so sometimes we go fishing or pound cassava or rice.”

I later learn that they cannot go to school because Malaysia does not recognise them as nationals.

Riki, has a wide smile and her hair is tied up in a cotton wrap. She’s wearing a dress that is too big. She tells me how she and her siblings have never set foot in another country, but Malaysia still won’t accept them.

“The government thinks Bajau Laut are Filipinos” she says. “So even before I was born, my fate was decided. I would be stateless. I would inherit statelessness from my parents, who inherited it from my grandparents.”

Aasif hands me a fishing rod and shows me how to cast it. He tells me that he hasn’t seen his dad in two years, “because my dad doesn’t have any kind of identity card the police arrested him and took him away. I heard my Mom say

that he is probably in a prison somewhere but I know from my friends that they tried to send some to the Philippines. I hope they haven’t sent my dad there. He has never lived there. He won’t know anyone.” I am still feeling queasy,

so we move onto land. Riki shows me how she helps her mum grind rice by pounding it on a carved-out stone with a big pole. I give it a go. The pole is extremely heavy! It’s amazing how she does this. She is such a strong girl.

I take her picture!

This has been an amazing

BAJAU LAUT (ALSO KNOWN AS THE SAMA DILAUT) ARE A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO MOSTLY LIVE IN BOATS ALONG THE COASTLINE OF SABAH IN MALAYSIA. THEY DEPEND ON THE SEA FOR THEIR FOOD AND FOR WORK.



adventure. I never knew that people lived on houses in the sea. And these kids are such a friendly and fun bunch. You would never know that they face such hardship, that they cannot go to school, they work hard and some of their parents are even in prison. All of this is because they are stateless.

It's now time for me to go. I say goodbye to my new friends and go through my coin ritual again.



The sweet and citrusy smells of cardamom and boiling rice fill my nostrils as I open my eyes. I'm sitting in a kitchen, a slim woman with shiny brown hair plaited into a French braid vigorously stirs a pot. Four pots sit bubbling, steaming and sizzling on top of the gas cooker. The woman expertly keeps her eyes and hands moving across all four of them. "Can you pass me the onions Sima" she says to the girl playing a board game on the other side of the room.

Sima, ignores her mother, picks up her board game and runs over to me.

“Hello! Who are you?” By now I have telling my story down to a fine art... they all gather around me and listen. I am in Germany, as my **One Euro** coin tells me. I remember Lucas talking about being born in Germany. Wouldn't he love to know I am almost back to where I began?

“Neha” Sima says giggling. “In Arabic Neha means love and rain! Isn't that so weird? Who loves the rain?” I burst out laughing. I tell her that even in Nepali it means love and rain, but also eyes. In fact, my Mom would always tell us that to her, “Neha” means “beautiful dreamy eyes” and “Nikita” means “warrior princess”!

Sima asks if I'll play “Guess Who” with her before dinner is ready. As I try to guess which card Sima has and ask her yes/no questions like “does your person wear glasses?” she tells me that she doesn't really speak Arabic, but she tries. She speaks Kurdish mainly, especially with her family at home. And she tries her best to speak German and English. She loves languages and tells me to ask her my “Guess Who” questions in Nepali.

Sima, her parents and I sit on the floor in the sitting room. In front of us is a spread of all the delicious things Sima's mum Lorana had been cooking. My tummy is rumbling. There are little balls of fried dough. I'm not quite sure what is inside them, the flatbread looks so fluffy and the rice, dotted with the fragrant cardamom seeds, has a crispy layer on top – I've never seen rice served like this before but I'm dying to take a bite.

Sima and her family are Kurdish Syrians living in Germany. Over dinner her dad Sami explains to me: “we are **Kurds**, I was born in Syria, like my wife and my children, and we lived there all our lives before the war broke out. However, not one of us has Syrian nationality. Neha, we are “**maktoum**”, this means we are not registered in Syria. When a **census** was carried out in 1962 many Kurdish Syrians were not registered. My grandfather was on bad terms with his landlord at the time and when the census committee visited his landlord he did



THE EURO IS A CURRENCY USED IN 19 COUNTRIES IN EUROPE. EACH COUNTRY HAS ITS OWN DESIGN ON THE REVERSE SIDE.

MANY (BUT NOT ALL) NAMES HAVE SPECIAL MEANINGS. HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED UP THE MEANING OF YOUR NAME? WHAT DOES YOUR NAME MEAN IN THE LANGUAGE YOU SPEAK AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN OTHER LANGUAGES?

THE KURDS ARE AN ETHNIC GROUP. THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 20-45 MILLION KURDISH PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. THE KURDISH NATION HAS BEEN SPLIT OVER MANY COUNTRIES, SO THEY ARE A MINORITY WHEREVER THEY LIVE. KURDS IN SYRIA MOSTLY LIVE IN THE NORTHEAST AND NORTH OF SYRIA. EVEN BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA, KURDISH PEOPLE WERE TREATED BADLY. THEY HAD DIFFICULTY REGISTERING CHILDREN WITH KURDISH NAMES IN SCHOOL AND WERE PREVENTED FROM PUBLISHING BOOKS WRITTEN IN THE KURDISH LANGUAGE.



A CENSUS IS AN EXERCISE TO OBTAIN IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT ALL THE PEOPLE LIVING IN A COUNTRY. USUALLY, THERE IS A CENSUS EVERY TEN YEARS, BUT IN MANY COUNTRIES, THERE HAS BEEN NO CENSUS FOR A MUCH LONGER TIME.

DOLMA ARE GRAPE LEAVES STUFFED WITH RICE, MINT, LEMON, SALT, PEPPER, SUGAR AND SPICES (AND SOMETIMES MEAT TOO).



not pass on my grandfather's name for registration. My grandfather instantly became stateless and we have had to inherit this status and pass it down to our own children ever since."

Lorana passes me more **dolma** and says "We have told our story to many different people. Researchers come to collect our stories and tell us they will write them in a book, we were also filmed once for a documentary but we haven't seen the film. If you tell others about us, Neha, please tell them our message is to other parents. I ask mothers to imagine how it feels to know that the child they gave birth to is not registered in their name."

I feel sad and angry. My mind drifts back to my own mother. I suddenly worry that she may be missing me. How long have I been away? But I must find all the answers I came for!

Sima's dad holds his wife's hand and says "you try to do everything for your children, and yet somehow you know you are not able to give them everything that other children have. This feels horrible."

They then tell me a little about life in Germany, that they have been able to send Sima to school but they still feel like they are searching for a place to call home. "We have been here for two years and we really hope that we will receive German residency."

"We are **refugees** because of the war, but we are also stateless. If we ever go back to Syria will they recognise us as their own?"

Syria has never accepted us before. We pray that Germany will.”



I am in a big field. There are lots of people singing, dancing, drumming, laughing. It's hot and sweaty and full of life and happiness. I unclench my fist, the coin in my palm is a Kenyan **Shilling**. I have always wanted to travel to **Kenya**, I cannot believe my luck!

There's an amazing energy in the field. A man sees me and calls me into the dancing crowd. "Welcome, my young friend" he says. "Come join our celebration."

I ask him what they are celebrating. He laughs and says "we are finally recognised by our country. We are the Makonde. We were stateless, but we marched to **Nairobi** to meet the president and demand our rights. We are now citizens!" I am amazed, and I burst out laughing in pure joy. I immediately find myself thinking, 'so this is a fight we can win'.

I spend some time in the field, talking to and celebrating with the Makonde people. I learn that they were first brought from Mozambique to Kenya by the British in 1936. Despite living there for generations since, they were later treated as foreigners. On various occasions they were promised that they would be registered, but this never happened, and they faced many hardships. Felistus, a gentle and soft-spoken woman told me how when she was a child, her mother once had to carry her up a cashew

A REFUGEE IS A PERSON WHO SEEKS PROTECTION IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. A REFUGEE IS FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR OWN COUNTRY FOR VARIOUS REASONS, FOR EXAMPLE, BECAUSE THEIR LIVES, SAFETY OR FREEDOM ARE THREATENED BY VIOLENCE AND DANGER.

QUESTION 8

IF THE GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO GIVE YOU NATIONALITY, OR TAKES YOUR NATIONALITY AWAY, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHANGE YOUR SITUATION?



KENYA IS A WONDERFUL COUNTRY IN EAST AFRICA. IT IS VERY DIVERSE, WITH DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS. KENYA TOO WAS A COLONY OF THE BRITISH, WHO BROUGHT PEOPLE FROM NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES TO KENYA. MANY OF THESE COMMUNITIES FACED STATELESSNESS. NAIROBI IS THE CAPITAL CITY OF KENYA.



nut tree at night to hide away from the police. Dahili, a very fit looking football player told me how he missed a sponsorship opportunity to play football in Europe because he didn't have identity documents.

One of the elders, Thomas says, "finally we realised we were in a tight place in life. We looked for people to educate us on how to get our rights".

Peter jumps in, "we made a decision that we need to march to Nairobi to meet the president. We had tried all legal processes. Yet no one assisted us. We gathered in Makongeni in the coast region, started with prayers and then began our march."

In total, the Makonde trekked 526 kilometres, until they reached the president's house in Nairobi. They faced many challenges on the way. They were even stopped by the police. But they kept on going. Amina shows me a photograph of the march. It looks amazing, and I wish I had been there to support them!

Peter continues: "once we got to Nairobi, there were challenges. We were blocked again by many police officers who were heavily armed. Due to our unity and solidarity, we had no fear. We knew we had not done anything wrong in fighting for our rights."



I am in awe of these wonderful, brave people. But the most amazing thing is that the president finally did meet them, and he asked for their forgiveness, because it took such a long time to bring justice to them as fellow Kenyans.

By now, there is a small crowd around me, and they all chip in with how they feel.

Sylvester, an old man says “they made us forget all the pain. We are grateful and happy that we are Kenyan citizens.”

Amina adds, “even though I don’t have anything, at least I have an identity card. You just feel like breathing. Haaaaaaah. You breathe well now.”

What an amazing experience. I feel fully energised and confident to fight for my rights in Nepal too. I will never forget Peter’s parting words to me: “I have got my rights and I will succeed because I am a winner!”



Before I open my eyes I know where I am. The sound of busy roads and cars beeping, the thick, dusty air and the heavy heat of the sun on my black hair is so familiar to me. I’m home!



I can't wait to see Mom, to hug her and tell her everything I've learned. But as I open my eyes I see I'm not back at my village. I'm standing outside an office building in **Kathmandu**, the capital city.

I go in.

"Namaste **bahini**", a tall, smartly dressed woman bows slightly and I bow in return, hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointing upwards – this is our Namaste greeting in Nepal. Sushma Gautam tells me to hurry inside. Once in the reception room, Lila, a stumpy woman wearing an apron, with a nose piercing and silver bangles up both of her arms, asks if we would like some **chiya**. I can't wait to drink it again after being away for so long. I tried so much fantastic food from all over the world, but the spices and creaminess of chiya brings me comfort like nothing else.

Sushma aunty brings me into her office; I look at the leaflets on the desk -- I'm in an organisation that works for women's rights and helps people fight for citizenship.

Sushma aunty takes out her laptop and shows me a picture of young Nepali girls and boys protesting on the streets of Kathmandu. "Neha, you know that women and men, girls and boys, are equal, right?" I

nod my head vigorously. "Well, in most countries around the world men and women are considered to be equal and their equal rights are protected by the **constitution**" she says. "However, it is sad that in reality, the opposite can be true. Women make up half the world's population, but in most countries, they do not make up half the people employed in the government, or in technology and media jobs. They also often make less money than men, even for doing the

BAHINI MEANS YOUNGER SISTER IN NEPALI, BUT IT IS ALSO A FRIENDLY WORD USED BY WOMEN TO ADDRESS OTHER YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS.



CHIYA, ALSO KNOWN AS CHAI, IS A SPICED TEA COMMONLY DRUNK IN SOUTH ASIA. IT IS MADE BY BREWING BLACK TEA, MILK AND SUGAR WITH SPICES, LIKE CINNAMON, CLOVES AND GINGER.

A CONSTITUTION IS THE SET OF MAIN LAWS OF A COUNTRY. IN MOST COUNTRIES, THESE ARE WRITTEN DOWN IN ONE PLACE, AND THEY SET OUT HOW WE MUST TREAT EACH OTHER AND OTHER IMPORTANT RULES.



same job. At home, women are more likely than men to carry out chores and look after children – even if both men and women work full time jobs.”

Sushma aunty continues, “in **25 countries**, women still don’t have equal rights with men to give their nationality to their children. Nepal is one of these countries. Neha, your mother raised you and Nikita by herself but, despite this, she still has to prove who your father is and that he is also Nepali so that you can both receive Nepali nationality. Many government officials have very bad attitudes towards women. They don’t treat women with the same respect as men. When your mother went to register Nikita at the district office she was told that she had to bring Nikita’s father with her because ‘*children should get their nationality from their father.*’ This isn’t true though, and they were very wrong to treat your mother like that.”

I realise I am slowly shaking with anger. I remember the rude man in the government

HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT WOMEN ARE TREATED DIFFERENTLY TO MEN? DO THEY DO MORE WORK AROUND THE HOUSE OR ARE THEY EXPECTED TO DO DIFFERENT KINDS OF JOBS? WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS?



office, the judge in the court and the teacher in school. I think of everything my mother has had to go through, just because my country thinks it's OK to treat women badly. I think of my friends around the world who are also suffering because of bad laws and bad attitudes.

I ask Sushma aunty if this means I will grow up without a nationality.

She says "we, as lawyers, have helped many people in your situation. We will help your mum fight this case in the Supreme Court so that you and Nikita can grow up with Nepali nationality, in your mother's name, as is your right."

I feel a swell of emotion and gratitude towards this woman I have just met. I decide that I too will become a lawyer, so I can continue to help people get the nationality they deserve.

Sushma aunty tells me that the people in the picture are part of a group called "Citizenship in the Name of the Mother" and that they too are being denied the right to receive nationality from their mothers. Most of them haven't been able to get a job since they left high school, some of those who did were treated badly and never received their wages. She said without nationality you can't even buy a sim card for your phone. The group want to put pressure on the government to change the law. They protest outside government buildings every Friday. On my way home in the taxi, I write my final thoughts on this fascinating, colourful, exhausting, inspiring, educational, tasty adventure:

I feel Nepali.

I was born in Nepal, I celebrate all the traditions of Nepal, I speak perfect Nepali. But because of the law and some people's attitudes, my sister Nikita and I are not accepted as Nepali. But there is no other country that would recognise me as their national, or which I would want to be a national of (though I would love to visit them all). I have never lived anywhere else, my mother is Nepali, my grandparents were Nepali. If Nepal does not recognise me as Nepali, I am stateless.

Nationality is a funny thing, not everyone understands what it is. Most people have one, but some people don't.

I used to think everyone had a nationality, that you have the nationality of the country you are born in. But I realised I was different when my Mom found out Nikita couldn't finish her school exams. I now know that being officially recognised by a country as a national, and having a piece of paper, like a birth certificate, identity card or passport is so important for so many things. Without it Kezia can't bring her children to the hospital if they are sick. Rosa's children cannot go to school and may not have opportunities for good jobs. Grace may never be able to fulfil her dreams of travelling. Sima and her parents continue to search for a country that accepts them. And my sister and I must wait to find out if we can finish our schooling.

We can change this, and we must. People like Sushma aunty are working hard every day, to fight for everyone's right to nationality. There have been some great successes. For others, it is taking longer. And so, more of us need to join the fight. We must do everything we can, so that every child does have a nationality!

I am home now, looking into my mother's eyes. They are dark hazelnut and could trick me into thinking I am looking into the eyes of my sister. Her strong arms, and her hands, wide, flat, a little hardened on the palm, squeeze me closely to her. Those are the hands that cooked every meal for us when we grew up. She would always make food from different countries, sushi from Japan, Indian samosas, American potato salad. She gave us everything we wanted but now there is one thing she can't give us.

I tell her about all the children and parents I met around the world.

She is silent, tears in her eyes.

She finally says “stateless. My children are stateless. Because I decided to raise you on my own, without your father’s support. Because I decided to educate you and inspire you to be good human beings. I am a Nepali citizen and I am a single mother. But because I am a woman I do not have the right to pass on my name or my nationality to my children.”



It’s been a few weeks now since my adventure. I flick through my notebook and all my pictures. I have made some amazing friends and I have written to all of them. They all agree with me that it’s very silly that there are children and adults who don’t have a nationality. It is also very harmful. This should be such an easy problem to solve, if only grownups would all agree that no one should be stateless.

My friends from around the world and I are going to fight for everyone’s right to a nationality. We will learn more about what needs to be done and all fight for our right, and for our families’ right to have a nationality and to live free from discrimination. We will continue to share our stories so that others can learn the importance of nationality and why we must fight to end statelessness. We hope you will join us too!



Neha's Future



My classmate suggested we have a picnic on Friday to celebrate the end of our exams. I ask Mom what she thinks I should make. “*Shamburak*” Mom says, “I saw a delicious recipe on YouTube recently and I really want to try making them, I can help you **Nanu**.” Mom describes *shamburak* to me as fried dough stuffed with slow cooked meat, herbs and spices. Suddenly a wave of feelings rushes down my back and into my legs. I need to sit down. I can practically

smell the spicy and citrusy aromas of Sima's house. "Mom, are they a Syrian Kurdish snack?" "Yes Nanu" she replies.

NANU MEANS YOUNG GIRL IN NEPALI

The last few years have been a whirlwind. My friends from around the world, Grace and Sima, Riki and Lucas and everyone else all did so much to raise awareness about nationality and statelessness. And we made so many new friends along the way. We would write to each other sometimes too, and they got to know each other through me. But something about the image and smell of this food has mentally transported me back into that adventure which started it all.

Recently, we finally received Nepalese nationality! It was a long battle. My mom would stay up late reading about similar cases going on in the

DURBAR SQUARE IS A VERY HISTORICAL AND BEAUTIFUL SQUARE IN KATHMANDU.

Supreme Court in Kathmandu. We would protest outside government buildings every Friday after school. I even read a poem I wrote, about what it feels like to be stateless, in front of a large crowd of people in **Durbar Square**.

People from different countries would visit our house and ask us about our life. We must have been to the Supreme Court four or five times. Sometimes our case would be postponed and delayed.

Through this all, I felt trapped inside an invisible box; I could move, act, talk like a normal person but something out of my control and out of my sight was blocking me from becoming my full self.

Sushma aunty, our lawyer, was amazing. She argued that the citizenship law in Nepal went against the Constitution, which states that all men and women should be equal. We finally won our right to nationality. I'll never forget the day we received that news; I was so full of joy I wished the happiness I was feeling was contagious and could spread to everyone I knew.

The exams I'm taking are the same exams I feared so terribly my sister wouldn't be able to sit. I am only able to take these exams because I have a nationality. Even though exams suck, so much worry has cleared from my mind.

I now have a nationality. No one can take this away from me. I think of my friends around the world. I really, really want to see them again. To thank them

for everything. To tell them that I will continue to fight for them and everyone else who still doesn't have a nationality.

I tell my Mom I'll be right back.

I run to my bedroom and from under my bed and behind some bags I grab a shoebox. Inside the shoebox and underneath the letters, photos and my tattered old notebook is Lucas' bag of coins.

I reach in. Without looking, I pick one out. I squeeze it tightly and wish my special wish.

I open my eyes but I'm still in my bedroom.

I drop that coin and try another one and then another one.

Nothing. Nothing.

And then it strikes me.

I don't need the coins anymore.

I am where I belong.

I am recognised.

I am equal.

