

Conflict Resolution and the Psychology of Humiliation
ORLJ 4859
Assignment 1

Reflecting Upon an Incident of Humiliation

During my research work on a project on Genocide that studied the lives of the victims of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, I interviewed many such people who had gone through terrible experiences in their lives.

In particular I wish to narrate a brief incident in the life of Mr. S. (as I shall call him), one of those many individuals who were forced to flee their homes from what is now called Pakistan. I am not sure whether Mr. S. would regard this incident as a humiliating one, but it is surely one that he told me he would never forget and in the narration of which Mr. S. cried profusely. Mr. S. is a 75 year old Hindu, Sikh man who left his native home when he was about seven or eight years old.

On their very dangerous and extremely hard journey from Pakistan to India, Mr. S. a little boy, and his family had been on the move for days together like wanderers amidst very terrorizing circumstances. They had not eaten properly and he was extremely thirsty. Just as they were about to board the final bus that would get them to India, Mr. S. spotted a water tap in the courtyard of someone's house close by. He could not hold himself and despite the danger, he got off the bus. Just as he reached the tap and was about to quench his thirst, a Muslim man jumped into the courtyard from somewhere with a naked sword. He threatened Mr. S. with the sword and warned him that if he even so much as touched the tap, he would be killed. As Mr. S. narrated this incident to me, he cried for the first time in the interview almost like a child and told me in so many words how insulted he had felt at that moment. He said he could not understand as to how someone could deny a little child of a drop of water.

As I now recount this incident, almost after three years, I realize that this indeed was an experience of humiliation for Mr. S. Looking at this incident through the lens of all that I have read so far, I sense now that it was not just the mere fact of deprivation that had agonized my respondent, but it was *deprivation* in the context of intense hatred. As a little child, Mr. S. felt so violated in his *basic right* to drink water. He could not fathom how someone could deny him that very human and basic treatment. Probably the incident as especially recounted in his old age, reminded Mr. S. of that very pathetic and needy child that he viewed himself to be in that moment.

Coincidentally, every time I thought of this incident it made me cry, sometimes at night and it is now that I can place my feelings as well as the feeling of Mr. S. at that time. This leads to me think about the possible vocabulary or a lack of it that children possess in articulating their experience of shame and humiliation. Also it makes me wonder as to what impact humiliating experiences, especially during childhood, can have on individuals and their sense of personal and political identity.