The Toxic One

By now, everyone is aware of the term “Toxic relationship” or “toxic partner”. But what is this toxicity we talk about, and how do you give it out or take it in? I remember the first time these terms halted my boundless teenage dreams. For months after my breakup, I believed my ex was the toxic one. And it even felt true, because the moment the relationship ended, my anxiety dropped. It took me more than a year before I asked myself one of the most uncomfortable questions I could have asked myself. I thought, “What if I was the toxic one too!”

Yeah, I know. For the first few months, I was all about self-love and about how it's their loss, not mine. But this question bugged me. It was a type of question that was ruining my main character game in hindsight. It would ruin the dramatic playlists I had made. All the internal monologues and made-up scenarios I have had since my breakup, where they are the villain, will change if I found out the answer. But before you indulge in a self-driven guilt trip, let me clear up the difference between being toxic and reacting to toxicity.

If you're constantly lied to, ignored, and disrespected, and you snap, then congratulations, it's not toxicity. It's combustion. An emotional burst—like a pressure cooker finally whistling. And these were the same reasons why I thought I was not the toxic one; my ex was. But here is where things went a bit haywire for me. I realised, as I kept going through this chaos, I started carrying the reaction of it as a habit to places where it did not belong. And eventually, signs of trauma response like suspicion, over-explaining, waiting for the other person to react so I could prove I was right, and testing someone’s limit became auxiliary personality traits.

And then the brutal process of self-doubt began. “Did I convey that properly, or was I expecting him to just get it? Did I just stay silent so that the situation would diffuse, or so that I could weaponise this silence later? Did I really want peace when that argument happened, or did I want to win? At the age of 30, what I have learnt is that both of us can be toxic. Both of you can be toxic, but of different temperaments. Maybe he’s the manipulator, but you’re also on your A game as a gaslighter. Hence, gradually, the once intense relationship turns into a dragged-out episode of a badly written Bangla serial. And if you are bengali then you know. The whole Tollywood industry knows.

But there is a twist in the story. Toxic people very rarely wonder if they are toxic. So, if you’re thinking to yourself while reading this, “Wait a minute… why is this sounding like me?” Congratulations! You have more emotional maturity than actual toxic people. And if you believe you are the toxic one, but somehow you have managed to ask yourself that, then the next step is accepting. Owning up to your mistakes and learning from the humiliation. Growth is messy. Not the one you see on Instagram, where you cut all toxic people off and glow like you’re slathered in maple syrup. The real growth. The awkward one. The humiliating one and sometimes just an honestly painful one.

They take place in small moments when you are pushed to think of your action and reaction. It happens when you think, “Maybe my choice of words was not right for that moment. I should have handled it better.” Growth means accepting you’re not at your best behaviour all

of the time, no matter how old ass lady you are. Growth is painful; it's humiliating. It's admitting that you're wrong about something. It is about acknowledging the moments when you stayed silent when you're not supposed to, the moments when you should have stood your ground, but you let somebody else win. It is about noticing the patterns you once ignored.

Growth does not look like waking up early tomorrow and heading to the gym. Sometimes growth simply means washing your face every day before sleep. Unlike the time-wrapped edits you see in the movies, nobody really grows with dramatic and cinematic music in the background and montage. Sometimes it's just you, lying in the dark, torturing yourself with self-incriminating questions like these as you stay up a little longer staring at the ceiling.