

Reverse Culture Shock

I face countless criticisms on a daily basis. Be that over a harmless comment about Dhaka traffic or being happy about the cheapness of the beauty salons, I have been penalised for having an opinion about my own country— imagine that!

This trend has been a common gesture by the 'friends' and 'family' towards me and my fellow country-leavers whenever we came back home for the holidays during break or ever since I returned back to Dhaka for good— and in all honesty, I never understood the hostility.

And so, if you are a person who lived abroad, be that for higher education or for work, chances are you can relate big time to this week's digest. Here's to my fake Bideshis!

As per an article by Julia Kagan *"Reverse culture shock is the emotional and psychological distress suffered by some people when they return home after a number of years overseas."*

In simpler terms, suddenly you look around and realise that your mum re-did your old room completely which no longer smells like you; your friends whom you left behind have new groups to hang out with in newer places that you have never heard of before; the half-done apartments that you left beside your house now has families living there; and someone most definitely has stolen your previous cell-phone number (my brother in my case).

What most people fail to sympathise

People, who no matter how hard I tried, never seemed truly my own. Maybe I'm being a tad bit too critical of my situation, I made some life-long best friends who are in fact bideshis, my favourite bideshis to be exact.

with is the fact that all these 'small' changes that you say we are 'overreacting' to are changes that you gradually saw and accepted. However, in our case, we perceive and try to grasp them all together in one big blow.

Let us now talk about the number one excruciating thought that every individual stress about while moving back home— sharing the same roof with the parents

again! Don't get me wrong, I love my parents, some would even go as far as to say that I am somewhat obsessed with them. However, (and this is a big however), living back under the same roof as them obliged me to make some major changes to my four-years-worth of habits.

While some may say, (and they do) that four years is nothing compared to the last nineteen years that I've lived with them in peace, but in all honesty and seriousness— it is NOT the same.

The last four years of college played a crucial role in both making and breaking me as an individual. I have seen myself achieve things and develop skills that I never thought I could, and at the same time, I have let go of people and situations that I never thought I would.

And to add another scoop of ice-cream to this already overflowing cone, there is the factor of never feeling like you 'belong'.

Have you ever stopped to think how we survive out there without our parents, our own culture, our own people? I have had numerous people tell me that I should be grateful for being able to 'party-it-up' whenever I want without parental supervision and trust me, I was grateful. But I also had certain days where I would just look around and see people belonging to different communities, speaking different languages, uplifting different cultures surround me and for some reason amid all the chaos I felt lost.

People, who no matter how hard I tried, never seemed truly my own. Maybe I'm being a tad bit too critical of my situation, I made some life-long best friends who are in fact bideshis, my favourite bideshis to be exact. What I'm trying to say is that, who likes talking in English 24/7? Sometimes the Bengali language inside my heart would just fight to get out and that is when I missed home the most.

Now you must be thinking all this 'I-don't-belong-this-isn't-my-country' thought vanished as soon as I returned to Bangladesh, you're wrong. Because the hard reality of having the experience of living in more than one country is that you, my friend, are never truly home again.

Whenever I was there, I missed Bangladesh, now that I am here, there is nothing in this world that I want more than to just sit in my tiny room all by myself reading a good book. The feeling of not belonging anywhere anymore or not being able to relate to your best friends anymore can be extremely excruciating because life is funny like that.

So, you see, these were only few of the endless trauma we face (at least I did) upon returning back home. Some may disagree but for me, reverse culture shock is real and I am most definitely learning to cope better with it each day.

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LIFE AS IT IS

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A life measured in numbers

If something is not countable, it simply takes a back seat today; the honour of the front seat is reserved for things to which numerical values can be attached. In modern times, we want to be able to measure everything that goes on in life!

We count everything — from the size of the paycheque deposited to our bank accounts to the number of 'likes' on our last Facebook

posts. We count likes, follows, and views on our social media accounts. The more likes, comments, follows, and views our posts get, the more acceptable and popular we become to the world, or that is what the countable world would have us believe.

Our friends have become numbers. We count our friends — 500, 800, or more. The more friends and followers we have online, the greater the likelihood of pocketing more of those intangible 'heart' and 'thumbs up' ideograms. It's all about the number, you see.

We count seconds, minutes, hours, days, and months. "I had to wait 30 minutes get a call back from you." Or "Get that project done in no more than three weeks."

We measure our weight and count how many kilograms we have gained or lost. If I had gained two kilograms in the last two weeks, it means that I have to consume less calories the next two weeks to go back to my old body weight.

In the modern world, we count the

calories in the food we eat, and the calories we need to burn on the next gym visit. We install mobile applications and wear technology devices to track our steps, heart rate and sleep quality. We must be able to count everything!

We use credit cards and we take out loans from financial institutions. We calculate monthly instalments and interest rates. The bigger loan we can take out from the bank, the better and nicer our home is going to be. In the countable world, one's value is determined by what one owns — the number of cars, homes, and vacations one take.

In the countable world, we count game scores, credit scores, and rewards points. We redeem our rewards points to pay our outstanding credit card bill!

We calculate our test grades and GPA, for we believe that they will one day determine where we will go in life. We check our phone's battery health and count its charging cycle. We are possessed

by numbers!

But can everything really be counted? Can we count emotions? Can we count moments? Can we count the joy one gets from looking out over the ocean, or getting drenched in the monsoon rain, or playing with their children, or eating a meal cooked by their mother?

The countable world has consumed us to the extent that we have forgotten about the happiness the uncountable world has to offer.

For a change, look at the things to which you cannot attach a number to. Go on a vacation to relish the unique sights and sounds of a new place. For a change, shake off the obsession with taking countless pictures and posting them online to collect 100 'likes.' You do not know if life will give you another chance to watch a sunset from Mount Lycabettus. So, if you are standing on it, let this moment soak in.

By Wara Karim