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From childhood, our children are encouraged to speak up. In schools, talkativeness has been accepted as a proxy indicator for intelligence and attentiveness. 'Substance' is a secondary concern. If your child is the quiet type, chances are his teacher has already had a quick meeting with you. Because of early training in extroversion, parents often feel embarrassed when a child doesn't answer relatives' or *murubbis'* question with a spring in her step.

The introverts' wonderland has gotten stranger as *corporate culture* has taken root over the past two decades in Bangladesh. Starting from job-interviews to presentations, to meetings to CEO's speeches – brazen confidence and visible extroversion hold the keys to success: *speak up! Or get left behind.* We've all met someone outgoing and thought to ourselves, "Wow! I love her energy!" What, we are really conditioned to respond to, is extroversion. Ours is a fast-paced culture where people don't have the time to cultivate *real* conversations. In our superficial, perfunctory assessments – which seldom last beyond ten minutes – talkers are considered smarter. It is this social stereotype that drives us to employ politically-correct words like 'people-skills' and 'outgoing' are used to attract talkers to companies.



Think about the endless TV reality shows that we have: every single one judges contestants based on their degree of extroversion. And I don't only mean *talking* – but body language, willingness to display themselves (in addition to their *talent*) and the crowd-favourite, candor about family and romantic troubles. Moreover, our society also actively discourages introversion without knowing it. Consider that the word 'loner' is an insult? Think about any killer, bomber, terrorist you read about recently: did the media describe him/her as an extrovert or an introvert? Enough said.

Introverts, in the real world, will speak to audiences, perform on stages, whip up a gossip-session and chat up prospective clients. But they treat these as roles fit for certain social situations. Given the option, they will retire to environments with limited stimuli of their choosing. But in a world that's constantly communicating, sharing and arguing – the introvert's choices may seem eccentric.

In our society, the introvert is seen as retreating to a self-fashioned cocoon – maybe even with imaginary friends! Many take this for a sign of weakness. Some think it plain rude. But, ever notice that the dignified-looking uncle or the grey-haired CEO is never judged for their quiet demeanour? In fact, they are revered for it. Why does this double-standard exist?

Meet Susan Cain an American writer, lecturer and author of the book '*Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*'. "It was over the last century," says Cain, "that society began reshaping itself as an extrovert's paradise—to the introvert's demise." She explains that before the twentieth century, we lived in what historians called a 'culture of character', when you were expected to conduct yourself morally with quiet integrity. But when people starting flocking to the cities and working for big businesses the question became, *how do I stand out in a crowd?* We morphed into a 'culture of personality', which she says sparked a fascination with "glittering movie stars, bubbly employees and outgoing leadership."

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There's no denying that the Extroverts' wonderland is real and introverts must go down the rabbit hole. Our families, schools and offices prefer people who are bold, entertaining and gregarious. Magazines print articles titled 'How to Become an Extrovert in 7 Easy Steps'. The first step, for introverts like me, is to recognize that a social bias exists. That, of course, does not mean that introversion needs a cure. Experts suggest that introverted children should be allowed 'alone time' and activities that let their minds wander. We must recognise that they may not want to talk everything out or perform social roles on command.

Psychological studies, and anecdotal evidence, show that introverts learn to *fake* extroversion when needed and can later slip back to their own pace. Thankfully, research also suggests that introverts perform better academically, exhibit higher creativity and innovation (perhaps because they spend so much time alone, reflecting), take better financial decisions and more tenacious problem-solvers. If nothing else can console you, remember that introverts – with their power of reticence – can make the best politicians. Politics or not, remember that there is no correlation between the most talkative person in the room and the best ideas.

Adnan R Amin is a Dhaka-based strategy and communications consultant