



The revolution begins with us

A chance remark, offhand cruelty, prejudice, patriarchy, and escape from sexual predators — if you think dodging these cruelties do not take a toll on your life, think again! Six accomplished women, equally engaging, attractive and most importantly, empowered, discuss their awful memories and how it gave them strength to overcome future miseries.

SRABANTI DATTA

She is an all through professional, fighting head-on in a grossly male dominated industry. With a tough 'deshi' twang balanced perfectly with a down to earth attitude, she certainly conveys a sense of self-assurance.

In my opinion, 'women empowerment' is a sexist patriarchal term that accepts the state of powerlessness of women and calls for assigning them authority with the help of others. A woman should be able to secure her rights and choices within the society, similar to any man equal to her calibre.

That's equality!

And to me, equality is another word defining empowerment.

I also feel that stereotyping in the professional world can be addressed with thorough knowledge, good skills, and hard work. The best resilience comes from the best efforts, not superficial or half-hearted attempts. Other people's lack of confidence can only be challenged by our confidence that is rooted in competence, diligence and perseverance.

SHANILA TANEEM

Senior lecturer at a private university, director to a company, and the mother of a chirpy seven-year-old. Shanila is an all-rounder, who effortlessly projects a quiet strength and has a tight grasp over life.

Patriarchy is more obvious in my role as a director in the family business. The company is entirely staffed by men, and sometimes, I do feel a little out of place. Certain things help me maintain my ground and they are confidence, education and genuine interest in the work that I do. To me, empowerment is not about making women feel they are strong, but more about the practicality, like raising their status with education, and allowing them the freedom to make their own life choices based on their personal experiences.

PARIKA DEWAN

A full time homemaker and mother of two kids, Parika believes that women who can do whatever they want based on their personal choice, and without the interference of others, are the ones truly empowered.

I love wearing a black burkha, that's just my style. People keep on asking me why I wear a black burkha, and even go on further to intrude on my privacy to ask why I married so early and had children!

Personally, I think it is none of their business. But if you really want to know, it's because I love being a homemaker and a mother.

Why does it bother the world?

As long as I am happy with my decision, my life shouldn't be anyone's debate! And no, I am not unhappy, nor am I oppressed.

SHAHIDA RAHMAN

Soft spoken, but serious at the same time, Shahida is a full-time teacher for children with special needs. She has learnt the hard way that life is not only about a bed of roses, but more about picking out the thorns.

To me, empowerment is basically to live life with a sense of pride, dignity, and self-worth. Growing up in the UK, I was subjected to racial abuse. However, having moved to Bangladesh as a married adult, I experienced body shaming on a large scale. The internalised misogyny in our culture gives rise to unnecessary and uninvited opinions from 'well meaning' acquaintances



LIFE STYLE

to friends and family who feel the need to continuously comment on complexion, weight, height and skin.

Their pernicious comments always left me very self-conscious. They kept on saying "Why do you have acne? Must be your diet! Why have you become so dark?"...I was also subjected to absurd, inexorable questions regarding my daughter's complexion because she was not fair despite being born in the UK!

With time, I have learnt to tackle these harsh remarks with nonchalance. I have learnt that I am happy as a person as long as I realise my self-worth. Derogatory comments from others do not make any difference in my life.

BUSHRA HUMAIRA SADAF

A postgraduate student, hoping to be an entrepreneur someday, only because she wants to live on her own terms. Sadaf talks about the insecurities with intense feeling and conviction.

I used to work in the development sector, and my work required visiting the peripheries of the country on a regular basis. These visits used to get on my nerves recurrently because of the uncertainties. I was never sure about who I'd be travelling with, where I'd be staying or whether there'd be a hygienic or even a washroom at all.

Yes! Even in the 21st century, I had such basic worries haunting me. When the pressure of these tensions really started mounting, I couldn't take it anymore, and finally decided to call it quits to start something on my own; where I can live up to my own terms, there'd be financial freedom and

zero lack of basic necessities!

SOBIA AMEEN

An architect turned baking enthusiast and jewellery designer, flabbergasted by patriarchy and how elderly men just wouldn't take her seriously.

When people learn that my father is a senior architect, only then do they care about what I have to say! Until that happens, most people, especially older men, just don't take me seriously.

There was this one incident when I chose a certain upholstery for an interior design project, and the client just wouldn't accept my advice. Finally, my senior colleagues were able to convince the client to agree to the same fabric, but the irony is, his prejudice didn't allow him to accept my suggestions only because I was a woman, and that too, much younger than him.

Today, I am in a better position since I don't let the negativities affect me as much. But surely, I have a long way to go before all that tension becomes a thing of the past.

The leading reason for a discussion with six empowered ladies from different professional backgrounds was to prove that even in the 21st century, many women are deprived of human rights, even though society has advanced remarkably.

It is about time everyone in the society recognised women's rights as basic human rights and appreciated their efforts, based on performance; refrain from belittling women just because of their gender, because such a small and lowly thought process is backward, demeaning, destructive and a great obstacle to socio-economic progress.

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