

VICTORY DAY SPECIAL

Freedom in the *air*

The pleasures of victory come with a price. The Liberation War of 1971 was a watershed moment, not only in the history of Bangladesh, but the entire subcontinent, which at that time, was almost one-eighth of all humanity!

How do we remember victory day, 1971? How do we remember the plight of the near 10 million people who fled to neighbouring countries, fearing death and carnage? And how do we live our times in the present, as conscious citizens of a country that will soon celebrate its golden anniversary?

This week, we ask these poignant questions, and try to find answers, while we bask in the warmth of freedom. This week, Star Lifestyle is all about appreciating the patriotic hues and celebrating freedom in the air.

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Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Model: Mysha

WISDOM TOOTH

SANIA AIMAN
Sub-Editor, Star Lifestyle



To the rebel go the spoils

*Moha-bidrohi rono-klanto
Ami shei din hobo shanto,
Jobe Utpeerit-er krondon-rol akash-e
batash-e dhonibey na,
Ottachareer khorgo kripan bheem rono-
bhum-e ronibey na-
Bidrohi rono-klanto
Ami shei din hobo shanto!*

— **Kazi Nazrul Islam**

*Weary of battles, I, the Great Rebel,
shall rest in peace only when
the anguished cry of the oppressed
shall no longer reverberate in the sky and the
air,
and the tyrant's bloody sword
will no longer rattle in battlefields.
Only then shall I, the Rebel,
rest in peace.*

Translation by Sajed Kamal

It is not very common to learn of rebels winning against the might of the state machinery, especially one bent on achieving its goals regardless of the means, yet victory for the Bangladeshis on 16 December, 1971 was one such occasion, immortalised in the nation's psyche today.

Disregarding the various controversies and opinions surrounding the actual surrender ceremony, or the impact of guerrilla warfare until intervention by the Indian troops, the fact remains that the Bangladeshi win over the armed forces of

Pakistan cemented the necessity, worth and strength of a real public and mass rebellion.

What started out as political demand for autonomy and relative emancipation, turned into demands for outright independence in the face of clamp downs and denial of rights for the population of then East Pakistan, today's Bangladesh.

The military operation on 25 March, 1971, it can be argued, sealed the fate of the nation of Pakistan as it stood the day prior. As the military came down upon civilians with unforeseen and unforgivable strength and brutality, the majority, including many of those who had been ambivalent or outright against the political movement thus far, became converts to the cause. The brutality made rebels out of the whole diversity of youth in the country, from all walks of life, and all sorts of family, economic, religious, or social backgrounds. They acted as individuals, as bands of brothers, and as comrades in a war. Today, 49 years after victory, where do the rebels of Bangladesh stand?

The rebel today, I feel, is defined by their daredevilry, often in its most obvious form— expressing dissent in a prevalent culture of subduing opposition voices and clamping down on opinions using the strength of the state and kowtowing media.

The rebel today, thrives in the hearts of the children and youth who stand up

against the corrupt and derelict transport mafia, those who are bravely patriotic, and have the courage to call out the problems within their own state. The rebel today, is the youth who dares to read unsanctioned literature, listen to “discouraged and coloured” poetry and prose, keeps an open mind to the voice of their opponent, and dares to question their own nurtured or learnt beliefs.

The rebel today questions established norms, and yet is unafraid to stick to traditions that make sense to them. They dare to express unfiltered opinions on social media and stage, and invite respectful debate and analysis, even in the face of very real threats to health and life itself.

There is nothing inherently sacred to a rebel— every claim, notion, custom, action or belief is questioned and analysed for veracity, authenticity, and most importantly, for its relevance to the nation's political and cultural lives.

To today's rebel, personal freedoms are paramount, except when measured against the greater good — a decision often mired in the intricacies of morality, especially when defining the greater good. But translated down to individuals and our acts, the lines between morally right and wrong are often not that blurry, and the greys uncommon.

Yet, the modern rebel has a flaw that the forefathers did not— a very short span

of attention. The fast paced and fickle nature of today's human relationships, affected and often shaped by social media interactions, and the very real connection of what people do vie their social media presentation, has made many a worthy cause drown in the quagmire of information overload. Anger, disgust, demands for justice, and even deep intellectual debate — lost to a funny parody of a song, or some inane joke that goes viral.

The mediums of rebellion are far easier than before; from easier versions like donning a T-shirt with a message, to the more concrete actions like creating awareness, standing beside someone who needs and demands justice and demanding it for someone who cannot do it themselves, advocacy for rights of the marginalised, working to create jobs and access to education and especially, information. Simply shunning the unscrupulous and the corrupt out of our public and private lives... every act of courage in today's culture of subjugation is a worthy act of rebellion.

The time for fashionably rebelling without a cause is long gone. As is gone the time to revel in what our ancestors have done or accomplished. Today is the time to be a rebel, embrace a cause, and pay our collective dues — unwavering against the onslaught of ignorance and oppression.