

What is freedom to you?

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The fight for emancipation of Bangladesh commenced on the 26th of March, 1971, which has shaped the future generations of our country.

As human beings, we seek freedom and refuse to be shackled by any barriers. However, its definition differs from one person to another. After talking to people from different ages, genders and backgrounds, I was able to get insight into the perspectives people around me have towards freedom, and life.

"The human mind is very diverse. One wants to be independent as well as submissive. We want to be subject to the Creator, subject to loved ones, or subject to the laws of the land. Whatever I do, I want to make sure I love doing that. But it is up to me to decide who and what I will love. This is freedom for me," says Shadma Akter, 53.

To Afra Anika Nawar Khan, 21, a student of English Literature, "Freedom is synonymous to breathing. Every time I feel caged in, I find solace through reading, and that ability alone makes me believe that perhaps freedom is being allowed to do what you love!"

Tamjidul Hoque, 22, a second-year LLB student, says, "It's basically whatever you do, you do on your own authority. There's always ups and downs in life but for a true free person, those ups and downs are a result of their actions or decisions. I also want to add that this is not similar to doing 'whatever' you want all the time."

Anika Bushra, 28, who currently works

at a bank, expresses, "Freedom for me is the liberty to choose, but with a rational viewpoint. It should be rational but never to cross unnecessary boundaries just to prove any point."

On the other hand, Syeda Erum Noor, 23, a final-year BBA student, sees the world in a more liberal manner, in a different light. "A sense of control over your own life. Being untethered and having the right to make decisions without worrying about who it will influence or affect. Being able to make one's own decisions about only one person's opinion and feelings – one's own. Choosing things based on what makes one happy and shaping one's life with only that regard. Being able to set your own standards, your own values, and your own metric system for life and all things in it," she shares.

When we are born, we are essentially only human beings. But as we grow up, we are chained by the common law and social construction. Many people do not get the authority to choose and speak for themselves.

Hameem Zaman, 19, an A Level student, expresses the need for being true to oneself and finding one's own "style" rather than following "trends". "Being myself without others judging me is 'freedom'. It is gaining others' trust of who I am rather than gaining their trust by fitting into a mould," she says.

Sharing similar views, Raya Mehnaz, 21, a third-year international relations student, says, "It's when you can self-express in a

completely uninhibited way. I have always felt a sense of constraint following my every move, whether it is how I dress or what I write. Some of them are shaped by societal norms and some are personal. Freedom for me would be to know that I can actively rebel against these shackles around my wrist and come out the other side without any personal ramifications."

Tanzim Noor Tanmoy, 21, a student at Islamic University of Technology, defines financial freedom. He explains, "As a person coming from a background where money was sometimes very tight, my viewpoint has been shaped by the idea that money can solve a lot, if not all of my problems that restrict my freedom to have options and make choices in life. Whether or not this will bring me true contentment or will only leave me with artificial or materialistic happiness is something I'm holding off on considering, until after I am that financially independent."

"Freedom is love. The right to love, the right to live as you like without harming anyone. It's a beautiful thing we are deprived of. The right to express ourselves is freedom," says Shammon Nahar Parapar, 27, an architect.

However, freedom is a luxury which many people cannot afford. When asked about freedom to the helping hands at our home, their response was not instantaneous. At first, they seemed baffled as they expressed that they had never thought about it. It took them a while to think, unlike others I had interviewed.

This really helped me to be a better listener and empath and understand everyone's outlook on life.

Asiya, who is 15, did not really know what to say about individual freedom. Suraiya apu, 30, works at our home; she got married as a teenager. She says, "I didn't get to experience any freedom when I was forced to marry underage. I used to cry a lot initially. We had to move a lot because I couldn't adjust anywhere. I found freedom in Dhaka when we moved here, when my youngest son was around 18 months old. This job enables me to forget the tension I have at home, but only momentarily. Now that I am financially independent, although I don't earn much, I'm glad that I can support my three kids."

She adds in a plaintive tone, "I feel bad when my eldest son, who's now 16, is reluctant to study after the pandemic happened and everything went astray."

What do you mean by freedom? What is freedom to you? Is it an illusion or a reality? It really depends on our outlook on life and how life moulds us into individual human beings.

In the beautiful words of Maya Angelou, "The caged bird sings with a fearful trill, of things unknown, but longed for still, and his tune is heard on the distant hill, for the caged bird sings of freedom."

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she likes to speak against any form of discrimination. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com



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