

LIFE AS IT IS

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Patriotism is more than slogans and street movements

What does patriotism or *deshprem* mean to you? To me, patriotism means love and devotion to my motherland. However, my love for my land is not blind or unconditional; it can question and point out flaws when necessary. I believe that patriotism does not mean unquestioningly supporting what one's country does. Instead, it means taking a critical stance for national betterment. A nation that does not or cannot question is associated with authoritarianism or the suppression of dissent.

Patriotism manifests in various forms. We commonly associate patriotism with military service, as those who serve in the armed forces are ever-ready to sacrifice their lives for the nation. It is also closely linked to politics and politicians.

Ordinary people can be equally or



almost equally patriotic. We witnessed ordinary people's patriotic spirit during our nine-month-long Liberation War. Similarly, the nation witnessed ordinary people's patriotic expressions during the Anti-authoritarian Movement of 1990 and the July Mass Uprising of 2024. Alas, as a nation, we neither remember nor recognise the sacrifices and contributions of its patriotic ordinary citizens. Their stories often remain undocumented or unmentioned in our daily conversations.

Patriotism can take various other forms. Businessmen who do not cheat their customers by charging exorbitant prices are



patriots. Similarly, journalists who report events and expose the truth, religious leaders who promote mutual respect and harmonious coexistence, artists who preserve the nation's cultural heritage, and non-resident Bangladeshis who send remittances legally are all patriots.

Teachers who dedicate their lives to educating our future generation, doctors who spend sleepless nights treating their patients, mothers who raise their children to become responsible citizens, students who organise clothing donation drives in winter, garment factory workers who attend their workplaces come rain or shine, and public servants who refuse to accept bribes are all patriots in their own unique ways.

Whether mentioned here or not, anyone who loves their country and does not cause harm to it is a patriot.

Unfortunately, individual patriots do not make headlines; their sufferings and struggles are not highlighted in everyday discourse. They also do not reap the benefits of successful political movements; it is always 'business as usual' for these people.

No politician cares to ask a patriotic ordinary citizen about how he feels when roads are blocked for political demonstrations or what he thinks when political violence leads to arson and vandalism.

In Bangladesh, politicians rarely prioritise public interests over their own. This kind of self-centred political climate makes it nearly impossible for a nation to produce patriotic citizens. It is our good fortune that in spite of our sad political reality, patriotic Bangladeshis still exist. It is the loyalty of these people to their motherland, their resilience, patience, and diligence that have enabled Bangladesh to maintain some semblance of sanity amidst its ongoing political turmoil.

Teaching patriotism from a young age

Without patriotism, a country cannot progress. People who lack patriotism place personal interests above national ones. They hinder the democratic process, obstruct national progress, and disrupt communal peace and harmony.

Therefore, we need to instil patriotism in our children from a young age. Here in the

United States, a school day begins with the Pledge of Allegiance, a recited verse that pledges allegiance to the American flag and the nation. While some may debate this tradition and find it unusual, the pledge undoubtedly contributes to the strong patriotism among Americans. From a young age, Americans are taught to love their country and their flag.

In Bangladesh, we need citizens who place national interests above personal ones. One of the ways to achieve this is by implementing a well-rounded education system that not only teaches traditional subjects but also community involvement, music, art, world religions, foreign languages, digital literacy, and physical education. We need an education system that nurtures children and their potential, teaches young minds to think critically, to question, and to explore.

Designing a comprehensive education system that focuses on developing general knowledge, creativity, intellectual skills, and social-emotional growth will be instrumental in creating a generation that truly loves the nation.

Patriotism is a positive term and should not be distorted for personal or political gain. Engaging in violence and vandalism in the name of loving one's country is not patriotism. It is not patriotism when we try to silence the voices of people or parties, nor is it patriotism when we kill innocent citizens and set fire to public and private properties. Also, it is not patriotism when your actions cause immense suffering to ordinary people, who are as patriotic as you are, if not more.

Anyone who commits violent acts in the name of patriotism is misguided, as true patriotism entails working together towards national progress, putting aside individual differences.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Collected

স্বপ্নের ছোয়ায়, তোমার উপমায়,
বদলে দিলে যে আমায় ...

অ্যান্ডালিনা
সোপ

রূপচর্চায় আন্ডিজাত্য...

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