

The trauma they take to grave



SHAHADAT PARVEZ

Models play a scene of a real life drama -- eve-teasing.

SULTANA RAHMAN

When legendary nineteenth century novelist Bankim Chatterjee wrote the heartbreaking tale of Sree, a young woman who disappeared into obscurity after being tormented by teasers, in his book Sitaram, he couldn't possibly have foreseen that the ghost of Sree would return to haunt the Bangali society even in this high-tech age.

Take the classic example of Simi, the modern day equivalent of Sree. A young, vibrant, creative and freedom-loving artist who had an exciting future in front of her.

Yet, persistent harassment by a section of fractious youths near her residence in Khilgaon, threats of dire consequences for her and her family members and inexplicable apathy shown by the law enforcers forced her to opt for the last remaining resort -- suicide.

Eve teasing has become a wide-spread yet dangerous phenomenon of city life. Almost every locality in Dhaka has a collection of unemployed, loutish youths who indulge themselves in such uncivilised

behaviour. Their most common victims are school or college going girls and even older women.

In her suicide note Simi wrote; "My death is a protest against eve-teasing and harassment on women like me. I wish no other female has to die like me."

But despite her heart wrenching sacrifice, teasing goes on unabated and the law-enforcers do little or nothing to stop it. Since Simi's unfortunate demise, Mahima, Trisha, Indrani, Fahima, Rumi and many other sinless souls in Dhaka and across the country have greeted death under similar circumstances.

Now Simi's younger sister Saba is being subjected to the same kind of harassment reportedly by the accused in the Simi suicide case Doel, Khalil, Mofazzal and Ripon, who have been granted bail following an appeal to the High Court. It is even alleged that Ward Commissioner Nazrul Islam Nazif of Dhaka City Corporation's ward no. 26 is shielding the hoodlums.

Finding no one to turn to in such an insecure environment, Simi's father Md Ali Imdad appealed to Home Minister Altaf Hossain

Chowdhury to save his daughter Saba a few days ago.

"I have lost one daughter already. I don't want to experience that unbearable pain ever again," said Simi's mother Zarina Begum.

"For months those criminals hurled abuse at my sister. They even harassed her physically while she was walking or riding a rickshaw. Now they are out in the open again and I'm their next target" said Saba.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance (1976) contains provisions for punishments for eve teasers. Besides, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (2000) states a jail term of one year or a fine of Tk 2000 or both for the offenders.

Often the victim files a complaint with police but the inquiry and trial process is so time-consuming that the culprits can easily slip through the loopholes of the law.

"Eve teasing is happening under the very nose of the law enforcers. The existing laws of the country have specific guidelines for punishing the teasers but there are hardly any instances of those laws being put into effect. We are victims of this

situation ourselves," said Zarina Begum.

"When we complained to the police about Simi's plight, sub-inspector Bashar of Khilgaon Police Station came to our house accompanied by the eve teasers and even threatened Simi with arrest unless she curbed her free spirit and conducted herself in the manner which would please the 'boys'. That was the last thing we expected to hear from a supposed protector of the law."

The mental and emotional impact on women from eve-teasing can have morbid consequences.

"Eve-teasing creates a negative psychological effect on the minds of all women. But its effect depends on their emotion, age and social status of the victims.

"Those who are too emotional might break down easily and become mentally upset or depressed. This depression can make her mentally sick prompting her to do anything including suicide," explains Dr AHM Firoz, director of the Mental Health Institute.

Eating with a difference

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

"God has made the division between the rich and the poor but that doesn't mean that we can't taste the food of the wealthy," said Malek before digging into a plate of fried rice, chowmein and Chinese-styled vegetable, all mixed together.

The 30-year-old was only one in a group of around twenty fellow rickshaw-pullers and day-labourers who were savouring the Chinese items at Tk 5 a plate beside the road near the Balaka Cinema Hall in Azimpur. It goes without saying that the food was leftovers of a posh restaurant from the previous night.

For the city's unfortunate millions, the Balaka Hall, Shahbagh intersection, Nayabazar, Gulistan, Bangabandhu National Stadium, Kamalapur Railway Station etc. are spots where they can taste the mouth-watering *biriani* or the delicacies of five-star

hotels like the Sheraton or Sonargaon within their affordability. There, temporary street-side outlets bring in left-over food from the Dhaka's hundreds of community centres, restaurants and eateries for the consumption of the poor.

Cheap food is also available for those who prefer to munch on traditional *deshi* stuff.

12-year-old Shiuli sells lunch on the footpath near Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University.

"Majority of my customers are rickshaw-pullers. Hundreds of them arrive here for lunch exactly at 3:00pm after a grueling day's work. They are usually extremely hungry and tired. That's why I reach my spot in advance so that they don't have to wait too long," said Shiuli.

The lunch-timing is convenient for Shiuli and others like her whose source of food are leftovers from the canteens and dining halls of the university and different offices.

"I sell the remnants of the

lunch taken by students at the halls. That's why I have to wait until they have finished eating," informs Shiuli.

The menu usually consists of rice, *dal*, vegetables and occasionally curry, although you have to be very lucky to find a piece of meat or fish in it. The lunch-vendors also carry containers of drinking water with them.

"For Tk 10, one can eat to his hearts content. I can take as much rice as I want," said Jamal, a van driver.

Some lunch-suppliers however cook their food instead of searching for leftovers. Pari Banu prefers to cook and her items are more appealing to the customers although they cost a little more than the stale food.

"I charge Tk 12 a plate and an additional Tk 2 for every extra piece of meat," says Banu.

The remnant of lunch from the Rajarbagh Police Lines is also in demand among the poor. At Tk 5 a plate they get rice with *dal* and gravy of meat or fish curry.

Take your pick for panch

SOHEL ISLAM

If you happen to pass by the Peer Jongi's Mazar in Gulistan, there's every likelihood that you would hear a small loud speaker of a pavement-side shop announce -- "Ja loiben tai panch taka" (whatever you take will cost Tk 5).

The makeshift shop comprises a wide wooden platform with a plastic canopy protecting it from the sun and the rain. Beneath the shade are items ranging from pens and pencils, batteries, torches, cosmetics, plastic utensils to electronic gadgets, all spread out for the curious customers.

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quality of the products.

"We don't have to pay any rent or other bills for the shop. That's the main reason behind the fixed low rate of the items. Because of the negligible price, we get more customers. We make a profit of only 03 per cent from each cosmetic product. What we sell here at Tk 5 is being sold at Tk 15 to 20 at departmental stores. But we can afford to maintain our rate simply because of the higher volume of our sale," said Mutaleb.

After a normal day's business, Mutaleb can go home with Tk 50 to 70 in his pocket. However strikes, holidays or inclement weather can badly effect his income. "There are times when we have to sacrifice either lunch or dinner for lack of money," said Mutaleb.

One constant irritant in this otherwise peaceful venture for vendors like Mutaleb are the line-men.

"Everyday a lineman comes to collect Tk 35 in illegal toll from each vendor of this area," complained Mutaleb. The lineman is none other than the civilian representative of the police. Also there is the threat of eviction.

"The police is now carrying out a *Hamla* (eviction drive) inside the Osmani Udyan. The authorities don't realise that we earn our living by using a space on government land. Where will we go if they keep throwing us out without rehabilitation?" asked Mutaleb.

Hawking hankies

Young boys and girls -- they race to cars and auto-rickshaws, whenever a traffic tail lies in wait for green signal, to sell handkerchiefs



AUSADIR MACDONALD

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

It's not that nature alone always depicts the changes in season. Look around and you will find people's struggle for a living can show the seasonal shift.

Hanky vendors at the intersections of busy roads can easily be termed the harbinger of summer, as they remind people of the arrival of hot climates. They race to traffic signal points the moment red light blinks. Close to the vehicles, young boys and girls hawk the hankies with a refrain -- "Buy one, please". They move from one vehicle to another amid scorching sunlight.

"We do it only in summer," says Fatema Begum, who sells handkerchiefs at the Sonargaon intersection. "The more the weather becomes hot, the more we can earn," she said sporting a smile. "The more the people sweat the more they buy hankies." "We sell flowers or break bricks in other times," Fatema added.

The hankies look like soft towels -- mostly white. "The texture is not of good quality, but you cannot help buying one to wipe sweat off your face. Think of the sun beating down...you are caught in a traffic jam -- soaked in sweat," said Abu Saleh Siddiqui.

The hawkers buy the hankies

wholesale from garment factories. "I buy them from the section No. 1 of Mirpur," said Fatema. "I buy 100 handkerchiefs in a lot at Tk 350 and sell at Tk 500," she said.

The sale rate varies from place to place. Fatema sells a hanky at Tk 5, while Munir Hossain, another vendor, sells at Tk 10 apiece at Bijoy Sarani, as his items are larger. He buys them from Gazipur. "A hundred costs me Tk 700," Munir says.

Come rain or shine, the hanky hawkers rush to cars and auto-rickshaws in hopes of selling. Not always do they succeed. One vendor can earn Tk 3,000 to 4,000 a month.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

market price telephone numbers & city bus route

MARKET PRICE

Vegetables (Tk Per Kg)

- Tomato- 16
- Potato- 10
- Borboti, Beans- 20
- Dherash, Okra-16
- Jhinga- 20
- Chichinga- 16
- Jali Lau- 25/Piece
- Lau- 25/30 (Medium/Big)
- Patol- 16
- Lemon- 5/Piece
- Peas- 10/(450 gm packet)
- Sajna-25
- Eggplant-16(Black), 20 (White)
- Koralla- 20
- Pudina Leaf- 120
- Cabbage- 15
- Green banana- 10 (Hall)
- Green papaya- 10
- Lati- 16

Salad

- Cucumber- 16
- Tomato- 16
- Lettuce- 2/Piece
- Carrot- 12
- Onion Leaf- 30
- Capsicum- 180

Spices

- Green Chili- 20

Onion- 12

- Garlic- 36
- Ginger- 30
- Jira- 120
- Dhania- 30
- Daruchini- 140
- Salt- 11
- Soyabean- 46-49/Litre
- Butter oil- 210
- Ghee- 280
- Mustard oil- 70
- Dalda- 50
- Tea- 120-160
- Sugar- 28
- Wheat- 15
- Masur Dal- 42
- Pulse- 20

Fruits

- Pineapple- 25-35/piece,
- Papaya- 25-30/piece
- Fuli- 30-40/piece
- Bel- 15-20/piece
- Jackfruit- 150-200/piece
- Watermelon- 30/50-60/piece
- Mango (Indian)- 70/kg
- Green Mango-20-25/kg
- Grapes- 120/kg
- Apple- 80/kg
- Orange- 80-90/dozen
- Banana-35/dozen
- Ata-50-55/kg
- Jamrul-35-40/hundred

OUTING

Museum and Zoo

- National Museum- 8619396-9
- Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 8 pm, Thursday closed
- Muktijuddha Jadughar- 9559091
- Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed
- Bangabandhu Smiti Jadughar- 8110046
- Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed
- Ahsan Manzil
- Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed
- Shishu Jadughar- 9666466
- Open: 10 am - 6 pm, Sunday Closed
- Sonargaon Jadugha

TIPS

Do not use mobile phones while you drive

COURIER SERVICES

International

- Air Borne Express- 9561371, 9561372, 9550724
- Air Couriers Intl (BD) Ltd.-8815970
- Aramex International Courier- 9558003, 9559582, 9565075
- Airspeed Express- 9563494
- Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543
- Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606
- Banmgladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
- Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989
- Bengal Express- 9560642, 9552666
- Bangladesh Intl Courier- 953636
- Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948, 9558425
- DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703-7, 9886305-9, 9882057
- Enem Express- 9330699
- Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd- 9565114

LIBRARY & INFO-

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers

- Central Public Library**- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128
- Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
- Bangla Academy- 8619550
- Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407
- Nazrul Institute- 9114602
- Ford Foundation- 8116133
- Alliance Francaise- 8611557
- British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
- Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
- Goethe Institute Intl- Dhaka- 9126525-6
- Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
- The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
- Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412

CITY BUS ROUTE

Bus No.	Route	Starts from
1	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 10, 11, 12	Golap Shah Mazar
2	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 1, 2	Phoolbaria bus station
3	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mahakhali-Airport-Azampur	Phoolbaria bus station
4	Shyampur-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Airport-Tongi	Shyampur
5	Sayedabad-Kamalapur-Motijheel-Airport-Joydebpur-Gazipur	Sayedabad
6 A	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Gulistan 1, 2	Kamalapur
6 B	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 1, 2	Kamalapur
6 C	Motijheel Shapla chattr- Malibagh- Farmgate- Gulshan 2	Motijheel Shaplachattr
7	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 2	Sadarghat
8	Chittagong-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asad Gate-Kalyanpur-Gabtol	Chittagong Road
9	Demra Rani mahal-Motijheel-Kalbagan-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 10, 11, 12	Demra Ranimahai
10	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Kakrail-Mailbagh-Rampura-Biwa Road-Tongi Bridge	Sadarghat
11	Sayedabad-Motijheel-Fakirapool-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Tongi Bridge	Sayedabad
11/A	Sayedabad-Khilgaon-Malibagh-Rampura-Airport-Tongi Bridge	Syedabad
12	Shanir Akhra-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asadgate-Mohammadpur	Shanir Akhra
13	Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Jhigatola-Shangkar-Mohammedpur	Motijheel
14	Signboard -Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 12	Signboard (Chittagong Road)
15	Chittagong Road-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mirpur 12	Chittagong Road
24	Gulistan-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Airport-Uttara-Bipile	Gulistan