

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 1, 2020, ASHWIN 16, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



THE FLAWED IDEOLOGY BEHIND COACHING CENTRES

PG 3

WHY CALL IT A
"CHICK FLICK"?

PG 6



(On October 3rd, he asked me what day it was)

LIVING WITH AUTISM

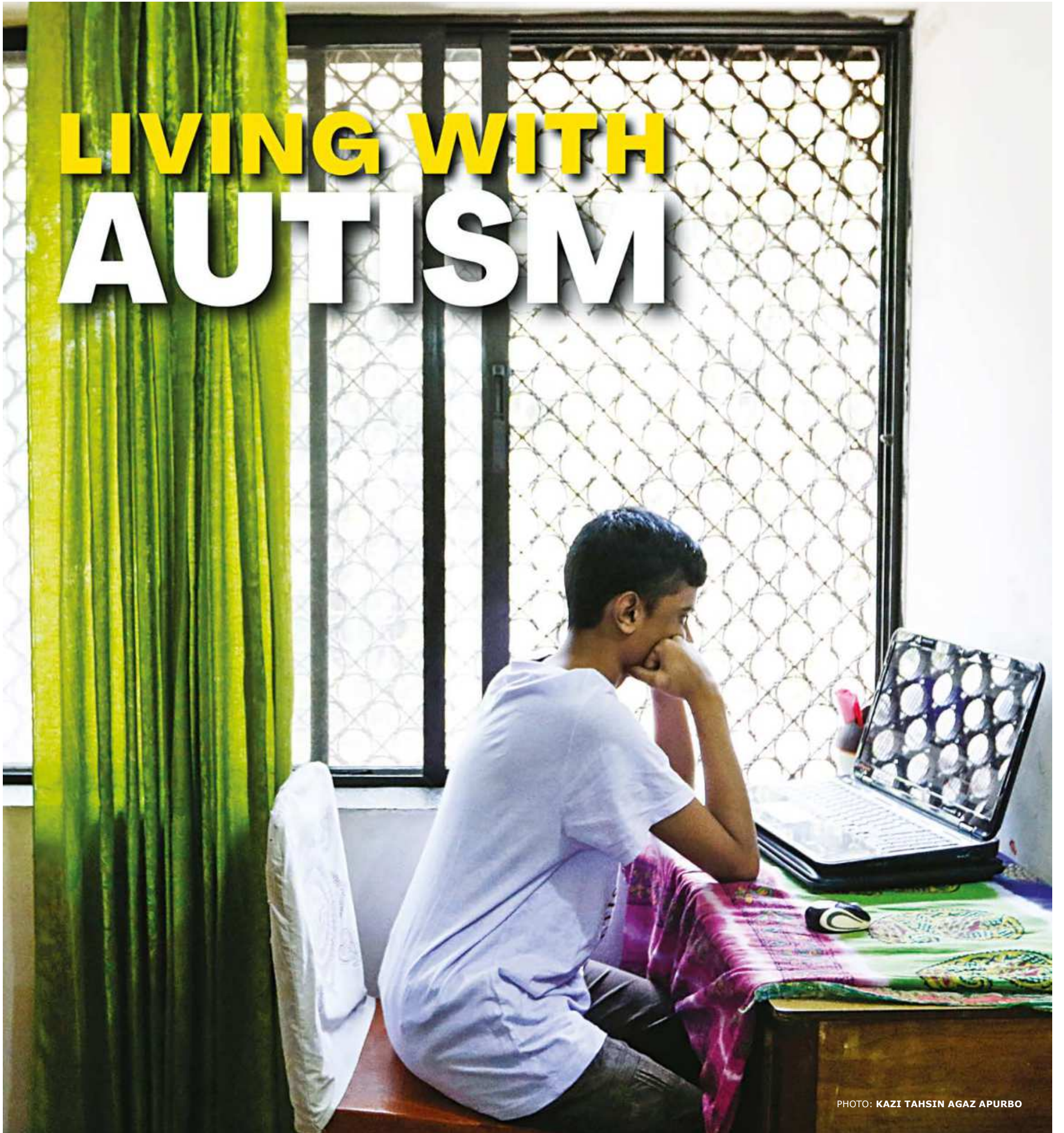


PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

EDITORIAL

When we talk about the youth, often we tend to exclude a segment of the young population -- the ones who live with autism. We forget they are born different, but live in the same world and society that we do. And it is not only those who are affected by the consequences of this condition, but their parents as well, who dedicate their lives in taking care of the special children. Look around, they are our siblings, friends, relatives and family.

Through our cover story, we want to tell you about the lives of people who live with autism. How different are their days from yours? What are their dreams? How does the future look for them? When we think about the youth, we need to include them as well. They may be intellectually disabled, or differently abled, and sometimes referred to as "special", but they are our own.

They are, also, the youth.

-- Kazi Akib Bin Asad, In-charge, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

FAKE INTERVIEW



INSIDE THE HOLMES HOME, SHERLOCK OPENS UP ABOUT ENOLA

PROTEETI AHMED

Interviewer: Good morning, Mr. Holmes. How's it going?

Sherlock Holmes: Yes. Hello. Good morning. I'm here.

I: ...Er, did we catch you at a bad time, Mr. Holmes?

SH: No. Yes. Well, not so much a specifically bad time rather than just a bad time in general.

I: Should we try this another time then, Mr. Holmes?

SH: No, no. I beg you to not be alarmed. Might as well get this over with. In fact, I'm presuming you might even be aware of my predicament, seeing as you're here in the first place.

I: Oh! You must be talking about the trailer for the new Enola Holmes movie out on Netflix. But, er, why do you call it a "predicament"?

SH: My sister's new movie! Yes, by Jove, this would be grand news indeed and not a predicament in the least, except for the fact that I *do not have a sister!*

I: ...No kidding?

SH: No, madam, I certainly do not kid under circumstances such as these! I just got the news and don't know who to ask first, that seemingly kind fellow who approached me from that Netflix, or my own mother -- either way, someone in my life has a lot to answer for at the moment!

I: Wait, who do you plan on asking first?

SH: Well, I had initially thought of asking my mother but according to my sister she has apparently gone missing so --

I: But Mr. Holmes...

SH: And I have to break the news to Watson too! I still remember how awkward it was the first time I had to tell him I had a brother and one who was as

erudite a person as he. Now I'll have to explain to him how I have a sister, one that even I did not know I had -- and well, it seems the biggest mystery I have ever had to solve will end up being my own life!

I: Mr. Holmes?

SH: Er, yes?

I: You are aware that the movie is a work of fiction, are you not?

SH: I... excuse me?

I: You said someone from Netflix came to you, what exactly did they explain?

SH: That there would be a movie where they would hire someone to portray me and, oh...

I: Are you feeling better now, Mr. Holmes?

SH: After comprehending the fact that I do not, in fact, have a long-lost sister who the whole world came to know of before me? Slightly. After remembering that I even remotely considered it as a possibility and acted the way I did upon it? Not quite. Although, I do blame it on my age nowadays.

I: That's quite alright, Mr. Holmes. Have you met people who have portrayed you in the past?

SH: Ah, yes. Robert Downey Jr. seemed like a fine fellow when I met him. And Benedict and I still occasionally correspond. Such a pleasant chap.

I: So can I assume you will be looking forward to this next portrayal too?

SH: I wouldn't go so far as to say that just yet, madam.

I: Okay, Mr. Holmes. I think that'll be all for now.

SH: It was very nice to meet you though.

I: Thank you, Mr. Holmes. You too.

Proteeti Ahmed is trying. Share life stories that also follow Murphy's Law with her at proteeti.14@gmail.com





PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The Flawed Ideology behind Coaching Centres

FARIHA S. KHAN

Over the past few years, we have witnessed a surge in the number of coaching centres opening up in Dhaka. While most of them started with good intent to bolster our education scene, provide a pathway to education for cheaper and play an integral part in developing the nation's future, they have slowly spiralled into a force that threatens to diminish the educational norms as we know it. As coaching centres grow in popularity, parents become more open to getting their children out of school and pushing them to go to more coaching centres, enforcing the notion that coachings are an essential and sufficient element for academic success. That's not true.

Schools are there for academic success. Coaching centres, by blending a lack of discipline and accountability, offer something more: the ability to skip out on lessons without repercussions. Put into the hands of rebellious seven-teen-something-year-olds, this can be a deadly force. When students leave school simply to pursue an education with help from coaching centres, it has the potential to become quite an unpleasant situation. Coaching centres don't have any obligations to look after the student's academic success, they will not hold students accountable if they fail to show up to classes like a school generally would, nor if the student's grades seem to be slipping.

Don't get me wrong, I'm a big believer in seeking help when you feel that you need it. But simply going to additional classes outside of school just because it's the norm will only further solidify the idea that coachings are



PHOTO: STAR

a necessity rather than getting you the help that you may actually need. It puts pressure on the families that struggle financially to send their kids to classes in addition to school because they might also be driven to believe that their child will fall behind without these classes.

The large classes that coachings often accommodate is simply another reason why coaching centres are a bad idea; if you're going to school regularly, you won't have much of a problem, but for the student who left school simply because they wanted to be homeschooled, it will pose a significant problem when their teacher cannot give them the time and attention they need to excel because they have so many other students to look after.

Of course, we have to acknowledge what a vital role coachings play in furthering the education of some students, but it's also important that we understand that they're causing more harm than good. Sure, they may

be able to teach better than your Math teacher at school, but can they teach you the importance of discipline and integrity? The importance of attendance? Or offer you the wide array of recreational activities schools do? Do they provide the same comforting words as offered by teachers you've grown up with? Perhaps most importantly, will they give you access to the same social opportunities that schools do?

On the other hand, we have to heed to the biggest reason we're witnessing such an increase in the number of coaching centres, which is that teachers are heavily underpaid. Therefore, they opt to teach privately instead, where they are more in control of their earnings. But as more students drop out of school, the problem just seems to grow rapidly. It's an endless cycle.

I know, not all coaching centres are operated by money-hungry sharks. But the fact is that today, most of them are, and the fact that more and more parents now want their kids to leave school and become homeschooled shows just how significant this problem is. So the next time you're thinking of joining a coaching centre (and leaving school) merely because your friends are, ask yourself whether you really need it. Can you get access to the resources they offer online? Are you being taught the material at school? Does your school teacher help you when you ask for it? If you answered no to all the questions, I encourage you to seek help. If not, you know what to do.

Fariha enjoys binge-watching movies in the dark vicinity of her bedroom. Send her memes at fariha.safa@gmail.com

LIVING WITH AUTISM

ALIZA RAHMAN & MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

Six and a half year old Rayat loves throwing things from his balcony because he loves the sound of objects hitting the ground. Despite his parents' best efforts to prevent him from doing so, one day, he dropped a biscuit on a woman who was walking by their building. His dad immediately apologised to the woman but she refused to listen.

"You see, my son is a 'special' child," Rayat's dad explained.

"You think only your child is special? As if the rest of our children aren't?" the lady shot back.

What the lady did not know is that Rayat is on the autism spectrum, and is a differently abled child. Autism, as a condition, is often misunderstood in society. While some have vague or misguided ideas of the condition fueled by ignorant representations by the media and persistent social myths, others make an effort to understand the condition by lumping together all people on the spectrum into one category. However, in reality, their symptoms and conditions are far ranging. People on the spectrum can be verbal or non-verbal, high or low-functioning. Some people are born with the ability to speak but over the years their ability to do so erodes. Such has been the case with Rayat.

Rayat loves swimming. He is hyperactive and loves to move around a lot. That translated to him becoming a good swimmer. We were all surprised. In fact, swimming helped reduce his hyperactivity. He also loves to go skating so we take him to open spaces when we can so he can skate," Rayat's father Rafiqul Islam speaks on his son's behalf.

Aymaan*, a young man at 22 years of

age, has many talents. All dressed up and sitting beside his mother in their living room, Aymaan is ready and intent to tell us about his life.

"I love computers," he tells us, "I love working with them."

"We wanted him to pursue a subject which he likes," his mother explains, requesting anonymity. Aymaan is currently studying for a graphics designing diploma.

Aymaan is both verbal and high functioning, meaning one can easily converse with him. After finishing his schooling from a mainstream school, he completed his SSC and HSC from Open School, under the Bangladesh Open University. Later, he started studying for his B.A. from the same institute. Aymaan also dabbled in theatre. He completed a six-month drama training programme following which he performed a play in front of an audience alongside the rest of the troupe. He says, recounting his experience, "It felt really good to perform in front of people. Some famous actors also came out and watched the play so it was really special to get to see them."

"He enjoyed the experience and became a part of the play but there were limitations also," his mother interjects. "He can't handle outings on his own. He used to go to classes but we don't allow him to go out alone with friends or acquaintances because we know he can't manage on his own. The people in the drama classes would hang out after class or would do street drama but he wasn't able to be a part of that."

Aymaan is also into fitness. "So maybe if graphics designing doesn't work out for him, we can think about a gym," his mother wonders.

Despite Aymaan being verbal and high functioning, he can't converse for very

long, according to his mother. "He can't make friends because he can't continue a conversation for very long. He can perhaps be described as a bit 'mechanical!'"

Zunaid Wasif, another bright 22-year old, joined us over a video call to share his stories. His sister tells us that Zunaid loves watching people being interviewed in the news, and that he was looking forward to this call.

"Zunaid, can you hear me?" we ask, and his face lights up as he realises he is being spoken to like they do on television. From then onwards, he speaks to us happily.

"I love cricket. I love the toss at the beginning of the match," he informs us. He also loves football and claims to be a Manchester City fan, loves going out with his family and spending time with his grandparents.

"My favourite part of the day is when I get to play video games," he says. He loves listening to the Backstreet Boys and more recently, Harry Styles. However, as for many people on the autism spectrum, communication is often a challenge. With the help of his sister, Zunaid tells us he loves cricket commentators; Harsha Bhogle is his favourite among all.

Even though these families have found a pattern to their lives by now, the journey to the present hasn't been easy. Rayat developed hearing difficulties when he was only eighteen months and then there were countless visits to doctors and therapists, both locally and overseas.

"We thought at different points that he had hearing problems and various different issues. Finally, he was diagnosed with autism. We were initially in denial. We couldn't believe our son was being diagnosed with autism. We stopped visiting our relatives as much as we did before because

they didn't understand the condition and we had to think how he would behave when we went outside. His mother had to give up her career because of the level of effort it took from us," explains Rayat's father.

The period of adjustment overall is often fraught with uncertainty, stress, and fear of how others will perceive, or even accept, their child. It can even take months for the parents themselves to come to terms with their child's condition. In those times, fear and uncertainty win over love and affection.

Tasneem Chowdhury received a call from her son's school one day. After rushing to campus, she discovered what had happened. When another child tried to prevent her son Muntasin from leaving the classroom, Muntasin fought back. He was consequently labelled as a problem child and was advised to take a few days off from classes, until slowly phased out from the school.

"I don't know what my son did. Children on the spectrum don't like alterations. They don't like change. They are quite innocent," she laments. "We lived in Japan when he was really young so Muntasin got attached to that country. When we moved back, he couldn't adapt. He missed everything we left behind but he can speak Japanese well. He loves languages too and likes his dictionary."

"Our social life definitely changed after his diagnosis. Many people don't understand the condition and it is difficult to keep such children calm when we go outside. I usually explain to him in detail where we're going and who's going to be there if we go somewhere," Tasneem adds.

All these difficulties can be slightly different for a female child with autism. Eight-year old Ahona Paul is on the spec-



PHOTO COURTESY: BEAUTIFUL MIND

trum and while her family struggles with the relatives, education and family life, there are more concerns to add to that list.

"We want only female therapists for her. And there are fewer female therapists out there and not always close to where we live. So we frequently have to go to centers farther away to ensure it's a female therapist," says her father.

Perhaps what hurts families living with autism the most, is the behaviour of people in the society towards them.

"There are many myths in society that have to go away," says Rafiqul Islam. "People think the parents must have done something wrong in their lives and their children have become a special needs child as a result. That they are a curse. That kind of thinking is harmful."

Dr Shamim Matin Chowdhury, child and adolescent psychiatrist and founder Chairperson of "Beautiful Mind", a school for children with special needs, mentions she's seen many cases where the mother was blamed for the child's condition, becoming a victim of not just her household but her whole family. The burden of the child, the families say, must be solely on her as the "fault" is hers.

"In cases like these, I try to provide genetic counselling to both parents. However, this is only possible if the parents agree to participate," says Dr Chowdhury.

Tasneem brings to light another issue. "I have seen online and in many places people use the word 'autistic' as profanity or call each other 'autistic' without reason. This is very hurtful. Why should it become a label? What did children like my son do wrong?"

"Another issue is representation," she adds. "There are so many shows and movies on TV that are made but I have rarely seen any that include people with autism. They can easily be shown as part of a story if it is presented well. Why won't people accept them as part of a story? They are real people from society after all."

But adjusting to society's gaze isn't all there is to the family's concern. "Institutions say they have trained and experienced teachers to cater to these children, but I have witnessed the lack of their knowledge or sincerity firsthand. Many schools and institutes do a sort of business with these children and that's simply unfortunate," shares Samina Wasif* whose son is on the autism spectrum.

"Many schools also don't allow intellectual-



ly disabled children to continue their education. At most there would be 4 to 5 special children in a large school so they can find a way to accommodate them. Schools can make the biggest difference to a child and I have seen that with my son. He was not in a special needs school but a regular school and being there and getting along with the teachers and other students brought about a tremendous improvement in his life."

This is one of the foremost challenges institutions catering to special needs children face. Dr Chowdhury states, "Finding trained teachers is difficult and a lot of teachers have no idea about autism and its related conditions. We provide on-the-job training, but not all teachers can manage to work with children with special needs."

Children on the spectrum require a proper school providing well-rounded education, with skills training and therapy. While there are mainly a few colleges from which people can get trained as therapists, Dr Chowdhury says that the number of therapists coming out is very few.

Children with autism are often left out of conversations and platforms. Their stories remain unheard of, and their lives are mostly spent within the walls of their homes. Without appropriate education and skills, they miss out on the chance to create a better life for themselves. Even though they are a part of the youth and a part of our society, we fail to include and invite them in our lives.

"We should think of it like this. The world belongs to all of us; it belongs to them just

as much as it does to you," Samina tells us. "Children with autism do nothing wrong. In fact, they are far more innocent than most of us. My son never lies or tricks anyone because he simply does not know how to do something like that. He never hides anything from me, never intentionally hurts anyone because he simply cannot. So, to me, they are like angels. They are blessings."

*Names have been changed for privacy

Aliza is Matilda resurrected. Reach her at aliza.hridula@gmail.com

Mrittika Anan Rahman is a daydreamer trying hard not to run into things while walking. Find her at mrittika.anan@gmail.com



Why call it a "chick flick"?

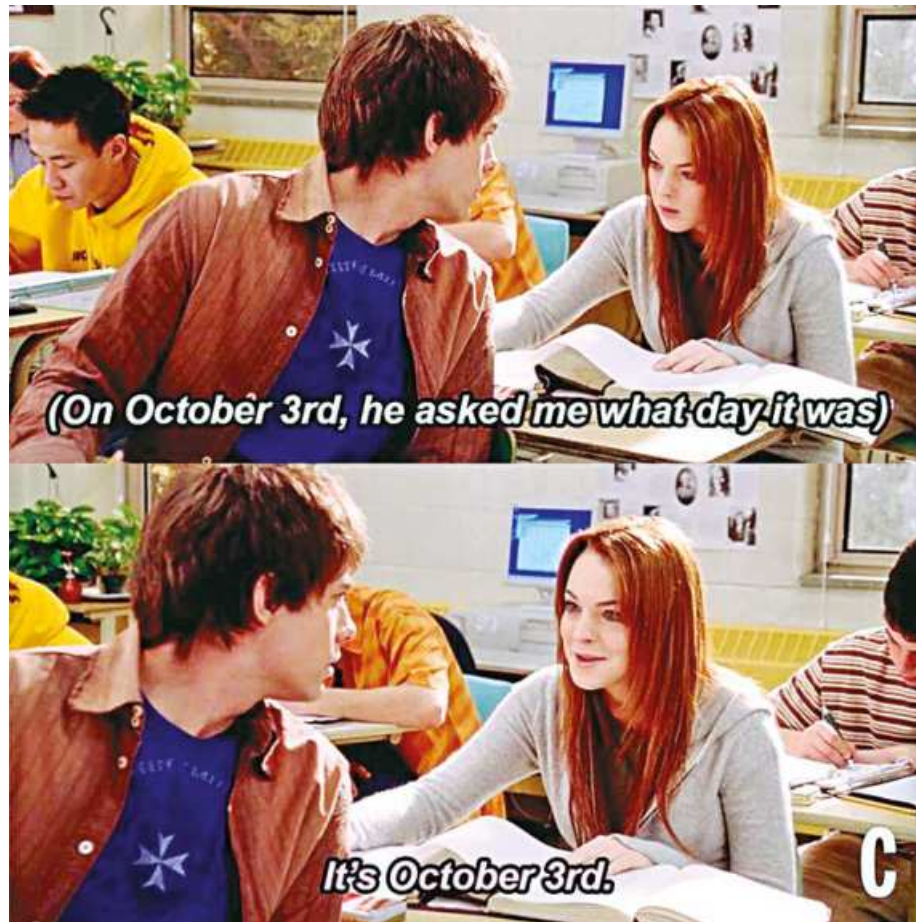
TASNIM ODRIKA

After a busy week, I like to take a night off and relax by falling asleep to movies and the majority of the movies I enjoy seem to fall under a category coined as "chick flicks". Recently I came across an Instagram post that questioned the coinage of this term. Somehow, before this, I had never quite considered why a particular set of movies are deemed as "chick flicks" or why a lot of people seem to look down upon it.

A simple Google search showed me that the term "chick flick" is essentially an informal and derogatory term that describes "a film which appeals to young women". Although films marketed towards a single gender might be problematic in itself but that is going to require a whole different article discussing how such adjectives may further perpetuate gender stereotypes. My issue with the definition of "chick flick" lies in the negative connotation held by the term.

Top chick flick movies include movies such as *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Bridesmaids*, *Mean Girls*, *Clueless*, and so on. A little digging would show you that the common factor in all of these movies is that they either have a mostly female cast or led by a female protagonist, and the plot also mainly discusses the issues faced by women.

The main themes of these movies circle around love and relationships (both platonic and romantic) and portrays how the main character navigates around these issues. Due to this, many might argue and say that such topics and the usual formulaic



plotlines of these movies are shallow which results in the negative remarks about these movies.

Then again, what deep message do movies such as *Superbad*, *21 Jump Street*,

or *The Hangover* hold? These are all light-hearted movies and yet they fall under the genre "comedies" with no other adjective used to describe them. Furthermore, if you look at the list of

the top movies termed as "chick flicks", which includes the ones listed above and also movies such as *Legally Blonde* and *She's The Man*, you will notice that in fact, none of these movies are shallow, and they actually deliver powerful messages to young girls.

I am not here to criticise any of these movies. My only question is, why do we need to use an extra adjective with a negative connotation to describe comedy movies with a female protagonist/cast?

This question seems to be answered by the famous feminist journalist, Gloria Steinem, who wrote in a March, 2017 opinion piece published in *The New York Times* regarding this same issue. She writes, "I realized the problem began with the fact that adjectives are mostly required of the less powerful. Thus, there are 'novelists' and 'female novelists', 'African-American doctors' but not 'European-American doctors. As has been true forever, the person with the power takes the noun, and the norm, while the less powerful requires an adjective."

It's about time to let go of this whole idea that anything enjoyed by women is something to look down upon. If completely letting go of the term "chick flick" is not possible, we can at least start scraping off the negativity surrounding it. Anyone can enjoy a chick flick.

Tasnim Odrika has only one personality trait and that is cats. Share ideas for new personality traits with her at odrika_02@yahoo.com

How reading goals take the joy out of books

AYSHA ZAHEEN

Growing up, reading was therapeutic for me. I always thought of reading as something I did out of love. Sheer enjoyment, really, was always my purpose. Ever since I was a little girl, I would get two or three books a month, and I'd voraciously read through every word, remembering everything to my heart's content.

Then I grew up, and gained access to social media. The thought of connecting with readers from every corner of the world seemed hearty, so I joined various readers' groups. That is when I came across the concept of reading goals, and it was almost as if I was never a reader at all, a thought that hit hard given I always thought of myself as a good reader, if nothing else. I started buying books in bulk, reading only half of them at the best of times, forgetting the rest within a few months. It wasn't till a year and half passed that I realised that even though I had read more books in those months than ever, I had retained the least. I had fallen for the concept of reading goals, to only grow to detest it.



ILLUSTRATION: EHSAN MOSTAFA INAN

I find reading goals a redundant effort if the aim is to get into reading. It is more about quantity than quality. If we keep reading books, we are only creating inputs that will be registered as short-term memories. These will not even go through our working memory to become long-term,

let alone leave behind an impact reading usually entails. It is better to read a book every month and be able to retain the contents for long than to read five books a month and wonder what they were even about after a year.

I have seen readers who were simply

in love with reading become unhealthily obsessed with the concept of reading. Whilst profuse reading is seemingly romantic, nothing should occupy the life of an individual to the point where it does more harm than good. Again, not reaching reading goals can be discouraging and may dishearten the reader entirely. We are supposed to derive pleasure from reading, not disappointment at one's own self.

Reading as a hobby is extremely straightforward and simple. Thus, complicating it further by attaching superficial goals to it is a superfluous attempt to challenge oneself. As a reader, one should not feel inadequate for having read fewer books than another person.

There is no denying that there are readers who can readily extract said pleasure even through reading goals, but I find it rather counterproductive and diminutive when it comes to attaining the actual essence of reading.

Aysha's brain unclogs at the sight of a crown of raven curls. Don't ask her what it is because she won't tell at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com

A PENCIL

TAJREEAN HABIB

It's a lifeless structure
 It strives all day,
 We write with it as if it's an adventure.
 It bears all the pain and does not dare to say,
 How exhausted it may feel?
 It doesn't make a blunder unless we do.
 Its sinew of creativity is as brawny as steel.
 To writing life it's more than worthy and new
 It always stays unflinching.
 But it has been stated
 As the most imperative, an element that is anchoring
 The creativity and way of writing in life.
 Even though it's made of wood and lead,
 In life it brings inspiration, no strife
 It's life's writing seed.

The writer is an AS student at SFX Green Herald International School



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The Umbrella Woman

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

As she turned to leave the cafe, with a bag slung over her shoulders, her eyes fell on a notebook left on the table beside her.

Picking it up, she chased after a man who had just walked out of the cafe. She recognised the black hat he had on. Her eyes searched the sea of people for its rightful owner but he was nowhere to be found.

She would stay around here, in case he came back for it. She decided. What harm would a few moments do?

Finding an empty bench, she slid onto it, turning the notebook over in her hands. It was made of a dark, rich, brown leather that wrapped around it. It was etched with pen markings in places, the edges were worn out. Colored papers stuck out from inside the pages, with unintelligible words scribbled onto them. Curious, Kara, flipped open the notebook, unable to stop herself.

She ran her fingers over the words that sat on the pages, among the sketches here and there. The handwriting was angry, as if the hand that crafted it, flew across the page in a fit of rage, the hand trying to keep up with the shooting thoughts that the words were born from. There were notes on various things; overheard conversations, unfinished poetry, descriptions of a particularly gloomy day, letters of hate and letters of love. For a moment, she felt almost guilty. As if she were looking through something she wasn't supposed to. However, despite her now shrinking conscience telling her to stop, she just had to go on. Now and then, there sat a rough sketch usually in the context of the words that surrounded it. In one stood a woman holding an umbrella. She had a dress that was drenched from the ends, wrapping around her like a wilt-

ed flower. Her hands clutched the umbrella and she had a look of distress on her face. Around her sat words of despair. Words that made Kara feel like there was no woman who was lonelier on the planet. The next page she landed on was a journal entry. The scribbly handwriting was hard to make out, but they told her of feelings that quite honestly, felt much too intimate for her to read. Yet, she read on. The words spoke of a man as if the writer were narrating his own life, talking of his feelings like they weren't his own. But something in the heartfelt sadness and rage told her it couldn't possibly be anyone else. His words cast a spell on her making her want more.

All the pages were painted from a place of desperation, words put onto a page as if to get away from them. As if the one writing it were haunted by the overwhelming amount of emotions he carried. Oftentimes, his words carried regret. Of things he had done and words, he had said. Of unfulfilled wishes, asking to take them back. The disparity in the way that he was. Letters addressed to himself. Speaking of vile, horrible things about oneself. But the ones of love, painted pictures of people that no other words could have done. It warmed her heart.

"Excuse me," said a man making her shoot up from the bench as if she had been caught committing some sort of crime.

"Yes?" She responded, in a voice much too high, her heart thudding rapidly against her chest.

However, seemingly unaffected by her behavior, he smiled. "That's my notebook."

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com



Kedi and Kukur: A Tale of Two Cities

ADHORA AHMED

Istanbul is a big, vibrant city overlooking the Bosphorus Strait. It was the capital of the Byzantines and the Ottomans, and their imprint is found everywhere in the city, not to mention the Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace and the Blue Mosque. But you know that already. What you might not know is that this city is also filled with much smaller, but no less significant imprints.

Istanbul is home to over a million stray cats, who are the subject of the 2016 documentary *Kedi* – the Turkish word for “cat” – directed by Ceyda Torun.

Kedi is an intimate, loving portrait of Istanbul through the eyes of cats, and the human beings they share the city with. It is said that cats are not only the cultural symbol of Istanbul, but the city’s very soul. There are different theories about how cats chose to rule this city. According to one version, during the Ottoman era, when ships from different lands docked at the Bosphorus, the ships’ cats would disembark and settle on the city’s hills. The residents welcomed the cats with open arms, appreciating their skills to hunt mice.

Istanbulites still love cats. They stop on their errands to pat furry heads they come across. It is a common practice to designate public drinking bowls for stray animals, including dogs. So is feeding cats on the way to work, or taking them to the vet. The documentary interviews people of different backgrounds and occupations, who fondly share anecdotes of their feline friends. The camera follows these balls of fluff all around the city – sleeping, eating, guarding their kittens, fighting over territory – and looking adorable while they do so. The interviewees also reflect on the nature of cats, and their relationship with humans. Some



PHOTO: PAHN CHAKMA

recount how cats helped them heal from within.

The documentary is a wholesome trip that lasts for eighty minutes. Yet, there is an undertone of concern over the future of Istanbul’s cats. With the rise of skyscrapers and gentrification, some residents worry that Istanbul is turning less cat-friendly. This affects the locals too, as a woman puts it, “It would be easy to see street cats as a problem and handle them as a problem. Whereas if we learn to live together again, maybe we’ll solve our own problems as we try to solve theirs.”

Does this ring a bell? Dhaka, at least in the south, is going through a similar dilemma with stray dogs. Last month, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) announced an initiative to relocate 30,000 stray dogs to curb dog population. At the time of writing this article, it had already begun. According to a report on *The Daily Star* on September 17, stray dogs from Dhanmondi, University of Dhaka and other areas are being sedated,

loaded on trucks, and dumped in the Matuail landfill site. It is not only counter-effective, but according to activists, illegal as well. Animal welfare organisations and activists have been protesting this move since the beginning, pointing out that the vaccination and sterilisation programmes they carry out are scientifically proven to be more effective than senseless relocation. Yet, the authorities concerned seem to pay no mind.

Then, there are a portion of the public who are applauding this initiative, who are justifying this cruelty against poor street dogs with pathetic excuses. I’m not going to list and debunk them, you’ll find plenty of media. What to ask them is, if you support what DSCC is doing, have you wondered why? Is it your hatred for dogs? If so,

ask yourself why you hate them, and if your reasons are rational. Do you hate them because they block your way? If so, I can think of much more dangerous threats outside: thugs, catcallers, reckless drivers, kidnappers and so on. Do you think dogs pose as much threat as them? The most a dog will “annoy” you is for food or affection. If you ever indulge in these wishes, even once, the dog you hate will swear loyalty to you for as long as it lives. They are not dubbed “man’s best friend” for nothing.

What restores my faith in humanity is knowing that there are many people in Dhaka and throughout Bangladesh who know this. Students who still go to their abandoned campuses every day so that their canine friends don’t starve. The homeless and day labourers who share their humble belongings with stray dogs. The ones who are against this move even though they are cynophobic. The ones who have braved the stink of Matuail to bring their beloved dogs back, in the midst of a pandemic.

To DSCC, I could ask the same questions a few paragraphs above. Please, mull them over. While you do that, watch *Kedi* as well (with subtitles, since it’s in Turkish). Maybe you’ll learn something that leads to a change of heart, something that will make you call off this initiative. As a fish vendor in *Kedi* perfectly puts it, “People who don’t love animals can’t love people either.”

Adhora Ahmed’s cats hate dogs, but what they hate more is the relocation of thousands of their foes to a landfill, because they wouldn’t wish this for their worst enemy. Join them in solidarity at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

