

Ananta Jalil’s dangerous tirade



ELITA KARIM

translating to, a deed is done only if two or more people come together to do it. It is not possible for one sole person to accomplish something.

Although this proverb has been used to justify ideas of working together for better accomplishments or to admonish children over breaking window panes during cricket matches in the streets, over the last many years, it has also been used to explain why and how rape victims are at fault. It takes two to commit a crime, and in the case of rapes and gang rapes also, women are blamed for enticing the opposite sex—either by smiling too much, being friendly, talking to a man, or most popularly—wearing the “wrong” or “revealing” clothes.

Even though one usually hears these statements from individuals with limited exposure to reality outside of their little world, or from people with little or no education, it was baffling and hurtful to hear someone like Ananta Jalil, an actor and a filmmaker, move along the same lines of victim blaming.

At the time of writing this opinion, Ananta Jalil has released three videos to date—the first one where he spoke against rape and blamed women’s attire, a second video where he edited out the part about women’s clothing and a third talking about how people are focusing on the negative and not the positive elements of his video.

Jalil’s six minute long video, the first one that rightly earned him all the backlash, was curiously posted from actor (also his wife) Barsha’s verified page. He had started off normally—

calling out the perpetrators, trying to instill fear in them by urging them to think about their own family members in similar helpless positions. However, as the pathetic background music moved towards the crescendo, his voice too was raised as he began to advise women on how not to get raped. The actor was heard addressing women “as a brother,” saying “Women (in Bangladesh) wear indecent dresses inspired by women from other countries, cinemas, television and social media. People look at your figures instead of your faces because of the indecent dresses. They make indecent comments (about women) and think of rape,” he said. “Do you (women) consider yourselves modern? Is the dress you’re wearing modern, or is it indecent? A modern dress means only showing your face and covering your body which will make you look good.” He went on to say that any dress that does not cover the whole body makes women look “very bad”. “You go out on the streets wearing a t-shirt like boys. And then you’re dishonoured and return home... you either die by suicide or can’t show your face in public.”

In the last month or so, reports have been rushing in about children under the age of six being brutally raped, of boys being raped by their teachers in madrasas, a married woman roaming the city with her husband raped by Chhatra League activists, and the one that shook the country to the core—a group of men stripping off a woman’s clothes and raping her while she pleaded for mercy. Yet another video that was also shared on social media before being taken down was of a group of young men trying to take off a woman’s burkha, molesting her and kissing her on the mouth while she pleaded for them to let her go. The woman was walking home when she encountered the group of molesters.

How is it that Ananta Jalil feels that women are to share the blame of this heinous crime? How does a commercially important person,

considered a highly respected position, especially in a developing economy, dare to speak to women, advising them not to get raped by wearing “decent” clothing? Is he oblivious to the previous cases of rape mentioned here? Or is he simply trying to move with the trend, making videos and disbursing weakly gathered information and ideas? Lastly, why does he not use his space to demand punishment for the rapists

films where women are not treated like sex objects but as equal beings capable enough to fight for love, family and friends? Why does Jalil not create opportunities for female (and male) technicians, actors, art directors, writers, directors to develop and grow in the industry?

It’s unfortunate that he would rather choose to create videos with petty messages where women and rape

to the third group, has been making absurd storylines for films, gained fame because of his over the top appearances and the nonsensical statements he had been making over the years, giving breaks to many a genius meme maker. In a nutshell, Ananta Jalil is a joke and not to be taken seriously.

But this is where it gets problematic. What the minority group—comprising a small percentage of individuals exposed to global trends when it comes to films, literature, politics and much more—fails to realise is that to the majority of film lovers in Bangladesh, Ananta Jalil is no joke and his words are taken very seriously. Especially in smaller towns and villages, where young women are still blamed by family members and neighbours for being sexually harassed or “eve teased” on streets while going to school, Jalil’s words on how women must share the blame of rape simply because of what they wear, have destroyed years worth of work done to empower women in Bangladesh, by policymakers, government bodies and human rights groups.

Art can change one’s outlook towards life. Films change lives and stories of long lost lovers coming together have managed to fill people’s hearts with inspiration for years. However, it is a shame that in a country where films, music, the arts and stories are still struggling and fighting to stay alive, a Pied Piper like Ananta Jalil pops up from the rubble of his own money, creating laughable content and making a comfortable space for himself. To make things worse, Jalil used this space to spread hate instead of love, as he claims to do.

It is high time to destroy these nooks and spaces built by big time influencers and focus on education, the arts, films and teaching compassion to people—instead of dwelling in the mediocrity that we are so used to.

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PHOTO: STAR

Ananta Jalil created controversy after suggesting women should dress decently to prevent rapes.

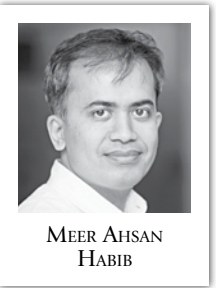
instead of advising women on decency? One might also point out that the world of cinema over decades in Bangladesh has always portrayed women as objects of desire, as beings who are unable to think for themselves and, of course, the ones who end up destroying close family bonds. Female characters have rarely been showcased as heroes, courageous personalities, human beings ready to take on the world or simply take a stroll in the neighbourhood without being sexually harassed or cat called by the young men next door.

With all his resources and finances, why does Ananta Jalil not work towards changing the age-old narrative and make

victims are put down. As Jalil’s video went viral within hours of release, social media users were surprisingly divided into three groups, instead of the usual two. While one group of people, mostly men of all ages and individuals holding on to antiquated beliefs, agreed with him wholeheartedly, another group vehemently opposed this thought on platforms, speaking against the actor’s illogical tirade about how to protect women from rape.

There was yet another group of people, smaller but influential, who spoke about why Jalil’s words and thoughts should not be given any importance. He, after all, according

Why do we have to take to the streets for justice?



MEER AHSAN HABIB

LEVEN people have so far been arrested in connection with the Noakhali gang rape. Most of the suspects were arrested within days after the video of the heinous crime

landed on social media. The graphic content rattled the nation as people of different quarters took to the streets across the country demanding justice. What would have happened had the video not gone online? After all, it happened more than a month ago and nobody knew anything. Now that we know she had been through this ordeal for many months at the hands of an organised gang led by a Delwar Hossain, we can genuinely raise the question, did the law enforcing agencies not know about Delwar and his unscrupulous gang?

This is not the first time that the people, and the youth in particular, have taken to the streets to demand justice. Whether we support them or not, there is a perception that justice is not always a straightforward process, even in a democracy that is built upon the principles of rule of law and protection of human rights of all the citizens.

The extrajudicial killing of Sinha Md Rashed Khan and subsequent incidents are blatant examples of abuse of power by state institutions and the people within them. Immediately after the killing, the local police made every effort to make it look like a usual case of drug peddling. Members of the local police frantically tried to kill the truth in a bid to conceal years of corrupt practices in the name of maintaining law and order. To divert peoples’ attention, the police resorted to character assassination of Shipra

Debnath. Similar to Noakhali, people from all walks of society condemned the killing and demanded an impartial and transparent investigation into the incident. The media too reported on the corrupt practices of members of the local police. It will not be unjust to say that peoples’ agitation and media reporting contributed to unearthing many facts that otherwise would never be known.

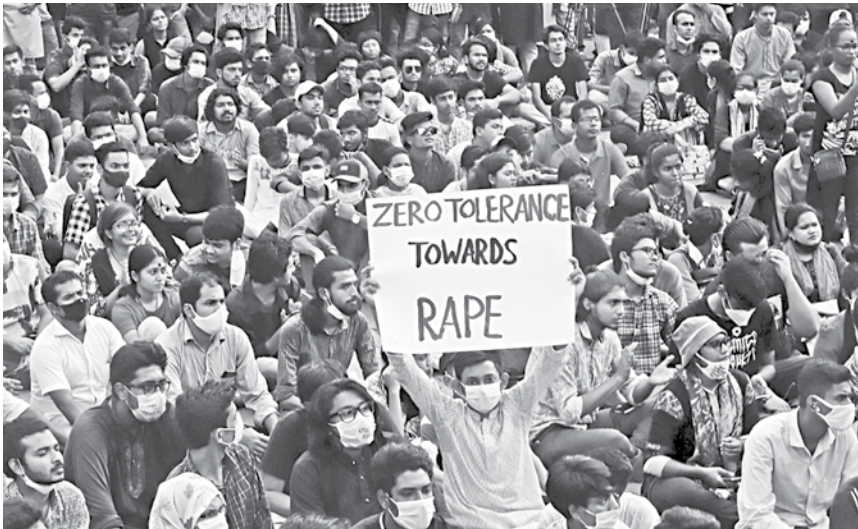


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQUE

Students of various educational institutions hold a mass rally at Shahbag intersection demanding justice against rape on October 9, 2020.

The rise of Delwar and his gang is not a lone example of political patronage. In the past, we have seen a similar uprising of criminals leading to a crime empire being built with political blessings and institutional patronage. Readers may recall that the most powerful students’ movement after the 90s movement for democracy was against organised rape. Having lost faith in the political system and institutions, the students of Jahangirnagar university organised the anti-rape movement in 1998 against

Jashim Uddin Manik and his gang. Over the years, the students witnessed how criminals rose to power under political blessings and how the institutions failed to check them. This led them to take to the streets to get justice.

In most cases, a criminal does not commit a crime on a mere whim. It is the result of abuse of power. Such a person gains and maintains power over an individual, group or community

within a society and subjects them to various forms of abuse, including but not limited to sexual, physical, financial and psychological abuse. The curious cases of exercise of power and control by Jashim Uddin Manik, Tufan Sarker, Rifat Farazi, OC Pradeep, Saifur Rahman and last but not least, Delwar Hossain, indicates their motivation toward psychological projection, greed and personal gratification with systematic political and institutional blessings—some politicians facilitated their rise to

power and institutions bestowed with the responsibility of protecting the victims turned a blind eye, until people started demanding justice.

Sadly, our political process is such that politicians always tend to shrug off their responsibilities and deny existing flaws. It immediately starts a blame game as if it is the cause and effect of the other party. The state institutions too, play a reactive role instead of a proactive one in protecting the human rights of the people. They act only after it turns into a sensational case. The National Human Rights Commission, for instance, have hardly conducted any investigations into extrajudicial killings, which constitute extreme abuse of power, although it enjoys the power of a civil court. Unfortunately, civil society organisations also do not always act beyond political ideology. Such inaction or reactive actions have created a vacuum that leads to people taking to the streets for justice.

Demanding justice on the streets is the last resort for people, but it is likely to happen every now and then when the institutions of society continue to fail. The question is, how did we get here? The answer is infuriating and disheartening—we have been here for quite some time. The culture of injustice against the vulnerable and powerless has been built and fortified over time. Over these years, we have failed to build a democratic and inclusive society. We have beautifully decorated our democratic institutions but without the desire and capacity of serving the vulnerable and marginalised people who comprise the major portion of the population.

Then what is the best way to fight and mitigate such violations of human rights and rule of law? We have to fight both the criminals and the background of the crime. It will be a mistake to judge the MC College and Noakhali gang rapes, and the brutal killing of

Sinha, merely through the lens of criminal laws. When the country speaks in the same language by demanding quick justice for the victim, the culprits are more likely to be punished under the existing laws of the country. To prevent a repetition of such crimes, we need to simply understand the criminology—what led to Delwar’s uprising and how did OC Pradeep, being an officer of law and order, continue his wrongdoings for years?

Many human lives were saved in the month of September as it did not see any extrajudicial killing. The countrywide agitations and media reporting against extrajudicial killings contributed to this achievement, which otherwise might not have been the case. But it is an underlying fact that when a society is politically and economically strong, the crime rate will decrease and we will not need to take to the streets for justice. The renewed stance of the government in the backdrop of the Noakhali gang rape is encouraging. Amending the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 may not be enough. Different provisions in the Evidence Act and Code of Criminal Procedure and prosecution of violence against women need to be revisited as well, but nothing can be achieved without a strong political system.

A strong political system and its institutions will stand ready to fight for its people irrespective of age, gender and economic status. Therefore, it would be far more effective to invest in criminology to analyse the main reasons behind the crime and eliminate them. A society without crime is perhaps impossible. The criminology here, in this case, is that we have a fair and transparent political process in place and that the institutions are not blindfolded and biased.

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ECKHART TOLLE
(Born 1948)
German-born spiritual teacher and best-selling author.

If small things have the power to disturb you, then who you think you are is exactly that: small.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Dance moves

6 Lawyer’s workload

11 Irrational fear

12 Swiftly

13 Trité joke

15 Suit accessory

16 Future embryos

17 Smidgen

18 Riding needs

20 Commotion

21 Holm of “The Hobbit”

22 Skiing surface

23 Earthy pigment

26 Pine

27 Map line

28 Clinic cost

29 Sister, of sorts

30 Badly

constructed

34 Nest item

35 Lennon’s love

36 Soup sphere

37 Storm flash

40 Sioux shelter

41 Audacity

42 Car of the ‘50s

43 Weasel’s cousin

DOWN

1 Leopard features

2 Shire of “Rocky”

3 Concluded

4 Snapshot

5 Learned one

6 Hacienda houses

7 Fitting

8 Guitar great

29 Sister, of sorts

9 Quito’s nation

10 Land a helicopter

14 Flat

19 Went out, as a fire

22 Appear

23 Jazz great

Coleman

24 Needed a lozenge

25 Emotional obstacles

26 Answer choice

28 Excellent

30 Runway worker

31 Left, on a liner

32 Search deeply

33 Diner patron

38 Maiden name label

39 Wager

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YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

B	E	N	D	S		P	R	A	Y
I	Q	U	I	T		A	N	D	E
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F	A	T	A	L		B	I	N	D
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D	E	B				R	E	N	T

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT