

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

"Hey, Azmin. Nice magazine you got there!"

"Thanks, we try our best."

"So, what's this week's issue about?"

Normally, I'd say this week's SHOUT is about women's issues. But these last couple of weeks have made me rethink many previously held notions. What we often categorise as women's issues are mostly problems created by men. Somewhere in this magazine, one of our writers uses the word "systemic". And that's what it is, this week's SHOUT is about the systemic problem of sexual assault on women in our society. This week, it's about parents who have failed for far too long to bring up sons capable of breaking the cycle. This week, we talk about how men try to subvert the narrative when it comes to sexual assault, and the responsibility you need to take as a decent man in these dangerous times. The demons of patriarchy in pop culture are discussed, and we also evaluate the different methods of protest against all of this.

I'm proud of this week's SHOUT. It comes from a place of anger and resolve. This week's SHOUT is a reaction – a youthful, constructive reaction to this doomed world that we occupy.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH YOUTUBE CHANNEL REVIEW



Fooling Scammers: Internet Justice

JISHAD BIN SHIRAJ AL HAMID

Over the years, there has been a surge in the number of internet scams being carried out on a regular basis on unsuspecting victims. Many such scams are carried out by scammers situated in the south-east Asian region, where the IT sector is currently booming. But in hindsight, more scammers are being met with internet "vigilantes" who use their hacking prowess to mess with and generally waste scammers' time, and possibly, bust their entire operation in epic fashion. Here are three YouTube channels on the forefront of giving internet scammers trouble, for our amusement.

JIM BROWNING

Those who spend a bit of time peeking at YouTube will have stumbled upon Jim Browning's channel. His most watched video is one with over 8.9 million views and is a detailed video of him gaining access to the security cameras of a major scamming operation, even finding out the names of the scammers and also who the top dogs in charge are. Jim's four-part video series looks at the scammers, the headquarters, the exuberant amounts of money involved in the scams and finally the boss—the guy running it all; leading to him eventually getting arrested (oops, spoiler alert). Arguably, this type of content can only be found in something like Mr. Robot, but no this is 100 percent real.

KITBOGA


Kitboga's videos are on the lighter side

of the spectrum as he messes with scammers using different voices/accents. Also going above and beyond by creating fake banks with legitimate looking websites that would fool just about anyone. Kitboga mostly tries to waste scammers' time so that they have less time to scam out actual victims of their money. One of his best videos is him impersonating an 87-year old grandmother and stretching out a scam to over 36 hours, which ends with the scammers absolutely losing their minds and yelling out slurs at the top of their lungs. There is something oddly satisfying about scammers behaving like children when the things do not go their way. Those looking to watch scammers making a fool out of themselves should check out Kitboga's channel.

SCAMMERREVOLTS


This is another channel that amassed massive amounts of views messing with scammers. ScammerRevolts' most viewed video has over 11 million views which shows him deleting files off of the scammers' computers, and the aftermath are just some weak slur-ridden comebacks from the guys on the other side who have no power over ScammerRevolts and have clearly lost in trying to rob someone of their money. Those looking for a laugh out of petty internet scammers and their desperate antics should definitely check out ScammerRevolts' channel.

Jishad likes the dankest of memes. Send him some at jishadshiraj66@gmail.com




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ONLINE PROTESTS

A NECESSITY OR A DISTRACTION?



MOMOTAZ RAHMAN MEGHA

Last week, I received a message asking me to change my profile picture into a pitch-black square as a show of solidarity against the systemic sexual abuse women in our society have been subjected to. Later, I found that this particular action has led to divided opinion among the general masses, where some people feel such symbolic gestures are effective and others feel as if it is a trend that does little, and will eventually die out.

This wasn't the first time we have seen the materialisation of protest via non-physical means. We saw black square profile pictures and an internet blackout after George Floyd was subjected to police brutality. We also saw the #ChallengeAccepted Instagram trend of uploading black and white pictures that was used as a gesture of solidarity against femicides. The "Vogue Challenge" was another symbolic gesture that was used to promote women from all walks of life in the cover of Vogue Magazine for promoting inclusivity. So, the idea of galvanising people towards a cause by non-physical means isn't a new one, but has it been effective?

When asked about her opinion on the matter, Adhara Ayndrila, one of the main organisers of the "Movement Against Rape" event that took place in front of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College on October 8, says, "Physical protests require people to get out of their comfort zone and protest from the streets. On the other hand, the comfort of social media and the fluctuation of what goes viral from time to time can easily dilute the focus and priority of the movement. Online protests are most likely to be forgotten when something new comes up. It is a good tool to reaffirm the narrative within people who already support certain causes, thus the degree of impact overall is very little."

Similar concerns about the effectiveness of the protests has been raised over the years. But on the other side of the coin remains a segment of people for whom the choice for going out to protest isn't perhaps as clear a distinction as black and white.

Auroni Semonti Khan, Joint Convenor, Swatontro Jote, comments, "I feel like there can be many reasons as to why a person might not be able to join a protest physically – ongoing pandemic, family restrictions, inability to get days off from work, the list goes on. But the display of solidarity via social media helps to capture the attention of many people and give exposure to the issue."

The underlying assumption here is that reaching



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

more people by getting more exposure is important for the movement. While some people feel like this exposure is often negative exposure, where the main message of the cause gets lost, other people disagree.

Auroni adds, "I don't think the increased level of exposure is bad exposure. Different people are influenced by different things. Our social circles are different. We can reach a lot of people using social media who otherwise wouldn't even know about our physical protests. Maybe by seeing so many people stand together for one cause will help create some level of deterrence even in terms of people's online behaviours. Maybe that one friend who has always been cracking inappropriate jokes online and sharing misogynistic memes will end up understanding the fault in their behaviour or at least think about the consequence of their actions due to repeated exposure."

While this seems like a long chain of behavioural change that stands on a "maybe", it is hard to deny that there exists a segment of people who are unable to access physical protests and a segment of people who spend a majority of their

time online and thus are influenced by it the most. There perhaps isn't any one way of standing for a cause because the problem affects different people in different magnitudes. Thus, telling people that their efforts of trying to be a part of this online revolution is ineffective is perhaps not the best way to promote inclusivity and empowerment. At the same time, neither of the methods – physical or online protests – are a perfect substitute of the other.

If I were to draw a conclusion based on my exposure to both sides of the issue, I would say that online protests are definitely important and effective, even if it is for a limited time frame. The reach of social media, the display of solidarity and the increased level of access makes it a weapon to be used to stand against oppression. Like every weapon, this can backfire for sure but that does not mean that we should be shunning people who try to be a part of the revolution and otherwise wouldn't have been able to do so.

Megha is a third year Marketing Student. Send her doggo memes at megharahman26@gmail.com

RESPECT BEGINS AT HOME

NABIHA NUSAIBA & RABITA SALEH

We have a serious problem. That one problem, or disease, branches out and manifests its symptoms in various forms in our everyday lives, from casual misogyny to the news stories that are now plastered all over our newsfeeds. However, that problem boils down to one thing. One singular issue.

People in our society do not see women as human.

A common branch of this problem, which tends to go unnoticed, is that people who belong to the middle class, well-off, and/or “educated” backgrounds deny its existence in their stratum. They believe this disease is limited to the “lower class”, “rural”, or “illiterate” people. But are these people doing enough to bring up their children with a different perspective from the very strata they consider diseased? Are they doing anything at all?

“When we sit for meals, my brother almost always waits for me or our mother to serve him. He won’t do it himself, and he’ll never ask our father to do it either. A couple of times, I asked him to take his own food. It was simply my intention to get him to be independent, or do what we do every day. I got scolded for calling him out. ‘He’s still a child’, my parents told me. When I reminded them that I used to serve myself *and* them when I was his age, my mother called me insolent,” says Rushmi*, a 17-year-old attending a reputed English medium school in Uttara, Dhaka. Her brother is 12 years old.

Rushmi is not alone. Many others can relate and agree that their male siblings are treated as babies for longer while they have been forced to grow up faster.

“My mother started badgering me to wear looser, longer clothes and cover myself with a scarf from when I was 11. A few months ago, I got really annoyed and asked her why she never bothers to correct the men on the streets or even teach my younger brother better. She told me not to be nonsensical, and that my brother is still young. My brother is barely two years younger than me,” says Shama*, 19, a freshman at a university in Japan.

While talking to these women revealed one side of parenting, talking to some of their male counterparts unveiled an entirely different approach. When asked whether his parents ever taught him to take part in household chores, 18-year-old Sreshtho, a college student residing in Uttara, says, “No, but even if they did, I wouldn’t have. I’m lazy.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

And I know it’ll get done.”

Pushpo Islam*, a 49-year-old flight attendant and mother of two, opens up about telling her son to do household chores. She says, “I have asked him to, but he never really does them”. When asked if she tells him as often as she tells her daughter, she responds, “I ask my daughter to do chores more often than I ask my son. It is better for girls to be independent.”

Does she think boys, too, need to be independent? She replies, “Boys are lazier, it’s harder to get anywhere with them.”

And therein lies not one, but two very crucial cornerstones of where parenting in our society can go wrong. It is not uncommon for parents to say that even though they tried to teach their child to follow a certain rule, their sons “just didn’t listen”. Besides, giving up and moving on when a son “just doesn’t listen” is routine practice. That rule, however, does not apply to a lot of daughters, whom parents generally find more necessary to “educate”.

Often, parents are embarrassed to approach their sons for a lesson on how to treat women. Sometimes they find the topic a difficult one, but mostly, they don’t even realise that it’s needed. However, teaching your son not to engage in harassment is necessary. In a society that does not respect women it is imperative that parents explicitly impart this

education to their children in order to make sure they do not get swayed by the unfortunately widespread perspective of viewing women as objects.

Furthermore, bringing up sons to not be abusers and harassers is almost the least you can do as a parent. It is a tragedy of our times that we are having to advocate for our parents to teach their children to not commit such atrocities. The ideal scenario would be parents not only teaching their offspring to not commit these acts, but also to oppose these acts wherever they see them being committed, be it by a stranger, a relative or a dear friend.

“A really common situation in our country is men staring at women outdoors, on roads, in public transport, in a really bad way,” says Shumon*, a 23-year-old IT professional. Our society enables these individuals to believe that they are entitled to women, and entitled to look at them however they want without any consequences.

When asked whether he has ever confronted such individuals, Shumon states, “I have felt that I should intercede in these situations, but I have not been in an extreme situation of such cases, and so I didn’t want to ‘create a scene.’”

In Shumon’s case he termed “extreme” as when the offending man would be continuously staring at the woman. We further inquired whether he thought that given the situation we find ourselves in now, these “mild incidents” that we tend to avoid “creating scenes” over, might be the symptoms of a bigger issue and therefore worth speaking up against.

“Given the situation we are in now, people should definitely speak up. The current situation has been created after long standing evasion of these sorts of confrontations. If we spoke up over ‘little’ things—if we spoke up when a man ogled at a woman even a few times—then the situation wouldn’t have reached the extremes that it has gotten to today,” concedes Shumon.

We did find a few people, including recent North South University graduate Taslim Imam Khan, who have spoken up against such harassment on public transport on multiple occasions. They mention that in most cases the rest of the passengers support whoever speaks up against the harassers. In one memorable case after Taslim confronted one such man, the rest of the bus passengers offered him their full support, to the extent that the offending individ-

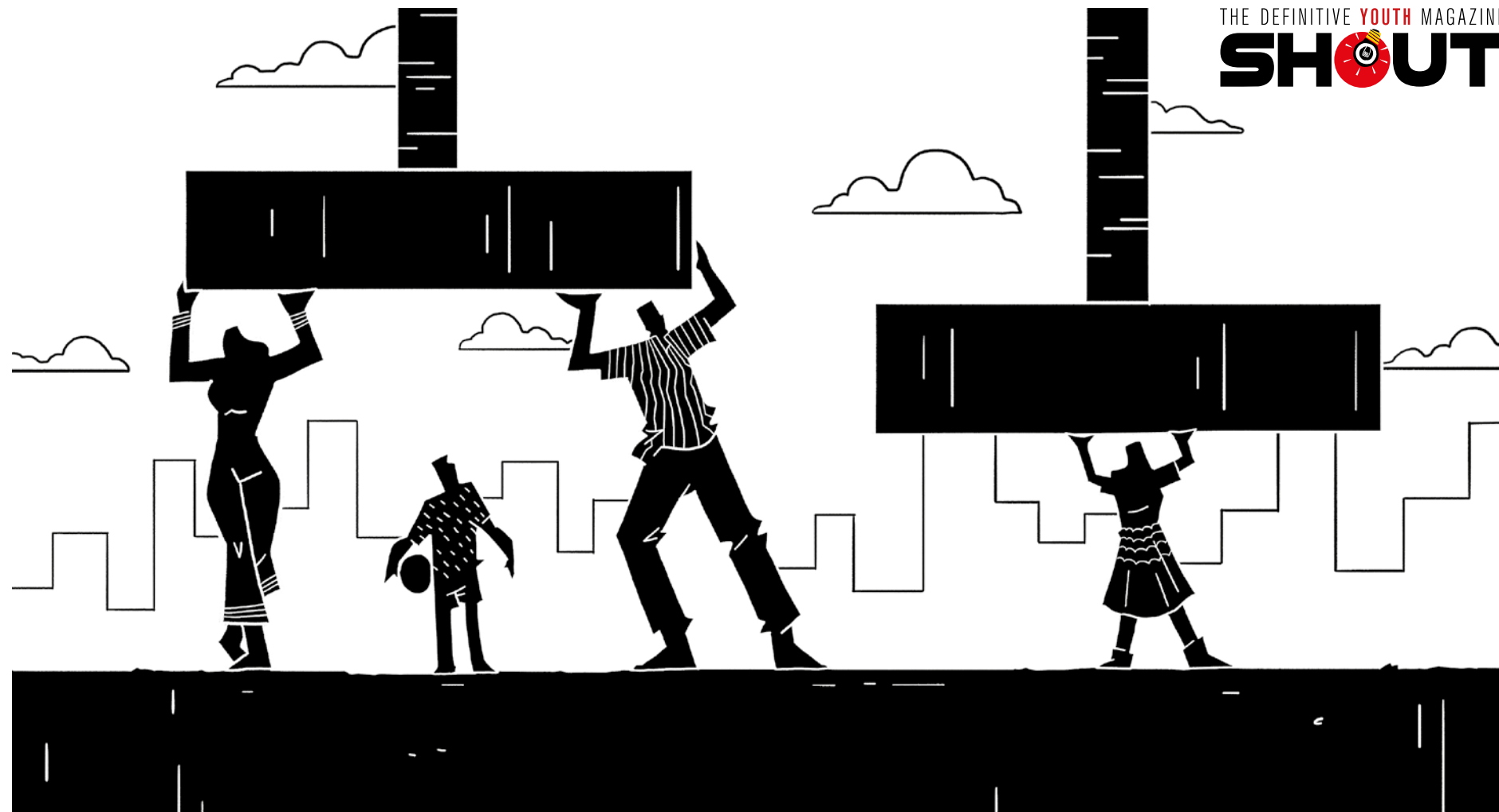


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

ual was asked to leave the bus. Such stories give us hope that if raised right, the children in our society can truly grow up to be model individuals and citizens.

On a different note, some people we interviewed were asked whether they “respect women”. They responded by saying they “respected people irrespective of gender, solely based on their behaviour”.

While that is an admirable view to have, the answer seems somewhat akin to the “I am an ‘equalist’ not a feminist” narrative.

Men’s respect in our society is inherent, and women’s is one that still requires a constant battle. So when you are asked whether you “respect women”, please understand the question and its context. Sometimes needing to answer a question with multiple deflective statements instead of a simple, non-controversial “yes” says a lot about a person.

Why are we so afraid to say that we stand with women against the injustices society puts them through? Why does advocating for an end to the oppression of women have to be

a controversial stance? Impose rules on your sons, enforce curfews on them, monitor their friends and actively mould their perspectives. Ask yourself where we would be as a society if we were as afraid of having criminals as sons, as we are of having victims as daughters.

“People think their sons will just grow up into good human beings without any guidance. But the fact is that sons left alone without guidance don’t grow up to be human. They grow up to be inhuman,” says Al-amin Rahman*, 68, and father of four.

*Names have been changed for privacy

Nabiha has found that, for a truly delicious pecan tart, you must overstuff the dough with toxic patriarchal practices and bake it at high heat for three days. Send her an email at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com for more culinary tips.

Rabita Saleh is a perfectionist/workaholic. Email feedback to this generally boring person at rabit-saleh13@gmail.com

Why We Need to Steer Clear of Not All Men

SHOUNAK REZA

“Not All Men” is basically an expression that is used to refer to the posts, comments and statements by people to claim that not every man out there has sexually harassed or abused someone, or harbours any such intention. When such incidents are reported, or when a woman comes forward with allegations of sexual assault, there is, more often than not, someone saying something along the lines of “Not All Men”. This intentionally or unintentionally drowns the woman’s voice by taking the focus away from her and placing it on the protection of the image of men. These comments gain hordes of supporters because as they try to put it, not all men harbour such desires.

In the patriarchal world we live in, it is not easy for women to come forward with allegations of sexual harassment or assault. Very few incidents make it to the news and when they do, united efforts are needed to address them. In a situation that is already fraught with so many challenges, “Not All Men” alters the course of discussions, accomplishing nothing except making things worse and hindering progress.

Anupa Ahmed*, who works for an international organisation and is vocal about women’s rights, expresses utter disapproval of it when I approach her, “When someone makes a ‘Not All Men’ comment, protecting male image becomes even more important than discussing violence against women, preventing conversations that are actually necessary.” She tells me how incidents of sexual harassment and the normalisation



of rape culture left her traumatised and how she used to blame and doubt herself at a young age. Things like Not All Men, she says, make it even harder for women to find the courage to protest.

Discussions regarding men are necessary when it comes to preventing violence against women, but instead of screaming “Not All Men”, it is important that

we understand, among other things, that the way boys are brought up in a patriarchal society is one of the many reasons sexual violence takes place.

To get an insight into this, I approach Laila Khondkar, a child protection specialist. “Most parents follow gender stereotypes while raising children. Children (both boys and girls) get used to stereotyped images of men and women through books, films, advertisements etc,” she says. “Social conversations and jokes also fuel this. Because of such stereotypes—and in many cases, witnessing a kind of power imbalance between their parents—boys grow up having a sense of sexual entitlement over women. This is one of the reasons many boys do not learn to respect women and understand consent.” After talking to her, I realise how important it is to address parental flaws, something that often gets overlooked in our society.

When a woman comes forward with allegations of sexual violence, the only discussions should be on the need to educate men on consent and gender equality. There should be conversations about the need to end the normalisation of rape culture and jokes (which are neither funny nor harmless).

While no man can possibly live through what a woman goes through from the day she is born, they can at least try to empathise and make the path to justice easier instead of screaming “Not All Men” and drowning the voices that have always been shackled and muffled by patriarchy.

*Name has been changed to protect anonymity

REWRITE THE BRO CODE

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

We all know the bro code. You know the one pop culture and social media insists is over other forms of ethical scriptures. For those who don’t, the bro code is a poorly strewn together set of excuses often used by the male population, to validate inappropriate behaviour or sympathisers of such behaviour.

It is the prerogative of the male species that they have a voice in situations women often don’t. Put it to good use. If such a playbook does exist, it should do so to improve the species and hold them accountable. Make changes to it, the world will be better for it.

NO MORE ROOM FOR LOCKER ROOM TALK

Men are often more prone to participate in social settings where women are being talked about in a not-so-respectable manner. Now, of course not everyone takes part in this. But if you’ve looked at a photo that wasn’t meant for you or laughed at a sexist joke about female friends, then you have also participated in perpetuating the locker room culture.

Regardless, that needs to stop. Not only are such conversations breeding grounds for ideas that need no popularity, it gives men the idea that vile things can be said about women and they can’t be held accountable for it just because they didn’t “do” anything.

DO NOT CONDEMN FEMINISM, WE ALL NEED IT

It is sad that in 2020, this still needs to be said: everyone needs feminism. It simply wants equality for all genders. That’s it.

So every time a woman does something questionable, don’t ask, “Where are the feminists now?” Feminists want equality; they want to get rid of gender stereotypes. Something all genders can benefit from. There’s nothing more to say about it.

STOP SAYING, “SO, DOES THIS MEAN I CAN HIT YOU NOW?”

No. You cannot hit them. You cannot hit anyone, be it another man, woman, or child. That is assault, and violent behaviour. It’s illegal.

The fact that the first response to the discussion of feminism is violence is a gravely concerning matter. This also goes to show that deep-rooted internalised misogyny is prevalent even in educated and well-to-do households.



NO MORE SWEARING WITH CONTEXT TO OTHER WOMEN

If you’ve lived in Bangladesh for over a week, you’ve probably heard profanities using others’ mothers and/or sisters. As disgusting and gut-wrenching as it sounds, somehow, these are some of the most common terms I’ve heard. Somehow, the women of the family are always used to point out or humiliate a person when the situation has nothing to do with them.

Stop people from using them, it’s as simple as that. They, too, are human beings who deserve respect and have no role in this feud whatsoever.

TALK TO YOUR BROS ABOUT CONSENT

Consent is a simple matter. Nothing apart from a “yes” constitutes consent. Notice your friends and the way they behave around women. Explain to them that a yes is a yes and no does indeed mean no.

If you are a man, you are already privileged. Put the privilege to good use. Be more vigilant in public areas or transport, you’ll be sure to notice at least one person being made uncomfortable. Create a safe space for your friends to be able to speak about their trauma, or things they need clarification for. The bro code only serves you well when it makes the entire population it serves, better. Collectively. It is not just enough to be good by yourself anymore.



BOTTLES OF WAVES

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Mr. Hakim was a very strange man for three things: he seldom spoke, he always smiled and he sold bottles of waves.

People trod uneasily upon the fine lines between liking and disliking him. They never cared for him but he had a way of making them curious about him. And in the village of Chunati, Mr. Hakim was somebody everybody came to know after he started his business.

Ayan Akhter was one of those people who came to Chittagong for its sheer, sprawling beauty. He didn't earn that much to be spending it on getaways like these. But he believed that to afford any luxury, you don't need money; you need to have the confidence to believe that this extravagance won't take your life.

And that is why Ayan chose to be traveling within the bowels of green Chittagong. And Cox's Bazar was his last stop. Ayan had opted to stay in the villages raking the borders of the sea beach so that he could witness the raw beauty of the sea, how its waves and the silt-splashed sand were enmeshed with the indigenous people there, rather than the blue lagoons flanking the ostentatious hotels.

When Ayan did arrive in Chunati, he didn't hear about Mr. Hakim right away. He had his own span of time diving in the green ponds and bathing with absolute strangers there, devouring a variety of smoked, blanched, fried fishes, snapping retrospective pictures of the native kids and riding in small, chestnut coloured boats that rocked like his consciousness when he would be back in the city. Rather, after two days while conversing with the villagers there, he came to know about the man who sold bottles of waves.

Ayan became curious about this trifling business and so on the next day, he decided

to pay a visit to that man. A rickety van trundled softly across the stone path as Ayan watched the leaves of trees overhead furtively dancing in the breeze. Soon, the van stopped in front of, literally speaking, nothing.

Ayan was taken aback as he had not anticipated that the drama would unfurl that early.

"Why'd you stop the van here?" he asked the van-puller.

"You get off here, sir. Walk a bit ahead and take a slight right turn, then you will reach your destination. It is what Mr. Hakim asks of anyone who comes here. I will wait for you here. Oh, and take your sandals off."

Ayan shrugged, took off his aquamarine sandals and headed off. He didn't mind the thistles meekly pricking his feet soles as he walked barefoot, but he couldn't deny that he felt a pang of fear like the sudden gusts of wind. His curiosity pulled him closer to that unknown man.

The path arched right like the backbone of an old woman as Ayan took a right turn ahead and stopped to take a good look.

Few meters ahead rested the brazen remnants of a wrecked boat that hovered over some spindle-shaped logs. The boat acted like the roof as under its huge shade sat a man.

Ayan had to squint to see the man for he seemed like a tiny part of the scratched skin of the boat. So he walked ahead and then sat directly in front of the man.

A gaunt face, bronze skin scarred with the salt of the sea and a grey bush of hair beaten by the fury of the wind – this was something Ayan had expected to see and that's what he saw. However, the man was also quite lanky but with an air of authority over himself. His face looked clean shaven, his clothes seemed fairly ironed. He looked almost literate.

"You sell bottles of waves," Ayan meant to ask him but somehow it came out rather like a statement.

"Why else would you be here?" the man smiled. "My name is Hakim."

Mr. Hakim sat on a faded purple *gamcha* beside a battered looking steel trunk. The lime paint of the trunk caught the sunlight and shimmered like silk. Mr. Hakim noticed Ayan speculating it but only smiled.

"So, *miya*, do you want to see one of the bottles of waves?"

"Yes," Ayan laughed, "I'm curious how you pull off the act."

Mr. Hakim opened the trunk and shaded it partly by his body from Ayan. He rummaged in it for quite a long time and finally closed it. He handed out something swathed in a green cloth to Ayan.

Inside was a slender, glistening glass bottle. It had just a small portion of water, and as the sunlight dappled it's glass skin when Ayan cradled it out of the green cloth, it looked like a miniature ocean, swelling and rising tenderly.

"Your bottle of wave, *miya*."

"It's beautiful," Ayan's first thought was like a small sprout of a plant that was abruptly crushed under a stomping foot of "I am such a stupid person". Ayan was furious, not with Mr. Hakim but with himself, that he didn't realise that of course, a bottle of waves meant this and nothing else. Why did he even bother to come here?

"This will cost you 50 taka," Mr Hakim smiled with an air of sharing some sort of secret.

"I don't want to buy it!" Ayan said incredulously, "Why in the world would I buy –"

"Once you touch a bottle of waves, it becomes yours."

"What! You didn't say that at first!"

"Why would you come here then? To see what you already know?"

Ayan was dumbstruck.

"Do you know where I got these bottles? I found them," Mr Hakim smiled at Ayan from underneath his straw hat, "I found them in the sea. These glass bottles weighed heavier than fishes. They were old, dirty but they had letters inside them. Letters written and sent or never sent. Letters that found no one to reach to, or no one to keep, when the blood of the war seeped into our seas and rivers. I scrubbed these bottles and replaced the letters with waves," Mr Hakim finished with a cackle.

"Why don't you just call it water instead of waves?"

"Water can stay still, waves never do. They ripple and break into arches, and topple over each other and drown and resurface. That is waves and that is life. Both go on and die the moment they stop."

Ten years later, Ayan quoted the same thing to his editor friend, Ishtiak. "And that sold you?" Ishtiak, laughed.

Sipping his tea, Ayan smiled at no one in particular, "I was sold the moment I decided to pay a visit to that old con artist. But what cemented my belief was what he said afterwards." Ayan opened his briefcase and brought out something draped inside a green cloth. He placed it on the table and inched it closer to Ishtiak.

Ishtiak looked bemused, "Is this the famous bottle?" He slid the cloth away and took the bottle in his hands.

"I might have replaced the letters with waves. But you can still hear those stories, those," Ayan looked at the riveted Ishtiak, "those *voices*," quoted Ayan, who ten years ago, suddenly left his business and became a mysterious writer of books, telling stories of the war whose blood seeped into our seas and rivers.

You can reach out to the author at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com

Unpacking the Horrors of Patriarchy in Cinema

RASHA JAMEEL

When Netflix's *Bulbbul* (2020) premiered on the streaming platform on June 24, there was much buzz around the film due to it being billed as a "feminist, revisionist tale" by critics and audiences alike. There was a significant degree of criticism surrounding the movie as well, regarding the script, runtime, and insincere portrayal of feminist rage. All acceptable debates.

Here's what baffled me — people refusing to address the film as a part of the "horror" genre.

Perhaps you felt the same way, you also thought that the movie didn't warrant the title of a horror film. Have you wondered why though? Was it the lack of jump scares? The absence of preternatural malevolence?

If your answers to the previous questions are "yes", then you've failed to comprehend the horrifying nature of patriarchal dominance in our world.

The true horror in *Bulbbul* lies within its depiction of violent acts carried out against women. Of course, the movie isn't exactly the first of its kind. Let's travel back a decade ago when Darren Aronofsky's masterpiece of a psychological horror, *Black Swan* (2010), came out in theatres. Actress Natalie Portman ended up winning several different accolades for her performance in the movie as the delusional perfectionist, Nina Sayers. The gender-based horror in the movie shifts from being seemingly subtle to strikingly obvious.

Protagonist Nina's emotional spiral begins and is further catalysed by the art director Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) for the Swan Lake ballet where she's been



cast as Odette/Odile. We see Nina witness the terrifying patriarchal grip on the lives of women in show business, as her ageing senior, prima ballerina Beth McIntyre (Winona Ryder), is driven out of a job by the misogynistic Thomas, and Nina herself

is then threatened with replacement and sexually assaulted at the hands of the ballet's director.

Black Swan showcases the harsh reality of women being treated as "disposable objects". Another one of Aronofsky's cinematic masterpieces, *Mother!* (2017), is imbued with similar themes and tones, albeit in a much gory manner. The film is heavily laden with Biblical references to Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the crucifixion of Christ, etc. with the titular character acting simultaneously as a physical manifestation of Mother Nature and the Virgin Mary.

In *Mother!* (2017), Jennifer Lawrence's character deals with toxic and abusive behaviour from her significant other who eventually encourages an uncontrollable mob to treat his lover with absolute violence. While the aforementioned circumstances primarily allude to the growing threat of global warming and overconsumption, the distress caused to *Mother* might as well be ripped right out of the pages of the patriarchal reality we all know so well, with a woman having both her rights and voice stamped out in a state of chauvinistic terror.

Further exploring patriarchal violence as a source of horror, up-and-coming director Robert Eggers gave us the indie horror *The Witch* (2015), an eerie piece revolving around the practice of non-conforming women being dubbed as "witches". Eggers' drama puts the focus on female lead Thomasin as she attempts to make sense of the disturbing events around her whilst battling both misogyny and misandry from her own family. *The Witch* (2015) doesn't hover above the idea of witchcraft, but rather delves into

the superstition behind a witch-hunt. Through Thomasin, the movie also dips its toes into the bildungsroman genre, as we see Thomasin attain a certain degree of agency at the end, molding her own identity of a witch out of the ashes of a family tragedy. In recent times, Josephine Decker's *Shirley* (2020) and Leigh Whannell's *The Invisible Man* (2020) offered even more varying perspectives on the role of a toxic man in perpetuating terror in a woman's life. The atmosphere in both movies border on claustrophobic with the disturbed female protagonists gasping to breathe under the weight of abusive relationships. What adds to the dread in both movies is how the male antagonists are perceived amongst their social circles. They get away with their crimes because of the mask of amiability that they always wear at social gatherings, resulting in the abused women being perceived as either delirious or hostile.

South Asian audiences denouncing *Bulbbul* (2020) as a horror film only proves how accustomed we've all grown to hearing about violence against women. Those of us who've been exposed to the problematic side of Bollywood, have even come to normalise gender-based violence through movies such as *Kabir Singh* (2019).

True horror finds a way to nestle under your skin and make a home there. You constantly dwell on it. What can be more terrifying than realising that the unsettling feeling in your bones is just one bad day away from being a nightmarish reality?

The author accidentally poured Savlon on her head instead of her favourite essential oil. Teach her to properly differentiate between the two at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

