

COMBATting PATRIARCHY ON INTERNATIONAL MEN’S DAY



SHOUNAK REZA

“If there is a women’s day, why can’t there be a men’s day as well?”

It is not uncommon to come across posts and comments along these lines on Facebook every year on International Women’s Day. To the people asking this question, addressing the challenges and obstacles faced by women in the patriarchal world we live in is clearly not important. According to them, the idea that a men’s day doesn’t exist simply diminishes the importance of International’s Women’s Day.

This might come as a big surprise to those people but, in fact, there is an International Men’s Day and today -- November 19 -- is that day. So, Happy International Men’s Day, everyone.

International Men’s Day is celebrated every year in more than 70 countries. Instead of shedding light on its history, I will focus on what we should discuss and address on this day.

First, International Men’s Day is not an excuse to demean and mock International Women’s Day. It is sad to note that most of the people wondering why a men’s day does not exist, do not really want such a day for the purpose of addressing the

myriad of issues faced by men. In this age, very few things are more than just a Google search away and if they really cared, they would just look it up.

Instead of playing the “Why isn’t there a men’s day?” card every Women’s Day, it is important that we mark the actual International Men’s Day by discussing the issues faced by men all over the world and one of the things that needs to be focused on is patriarchy.

This may raise eyebrows. I mean, we already challenge the patriarchy on March 8. Why should we talk about putting an end to it on a day dedicated to men?

We often fail to understand that “men” and “patriarchy” are not synonymous, and just a lack of understanding of what patriarchy means and what it can result in, has led many people to misunderstand feminism and the fight to end patriarchy. In fact, patriarchy does not favour anyone other than those men who are okay with abiding by all of the gender roles it imposes on them.

It is because of patriarchy that gender roles are imposed on people. Thanks to these gender roles, men who express emotions are looked down upon and shamed. Anger, on the other hand, is thought of as a masculine trait. Breaking things and getting

into fights are considered absolutely normal and nobody bats an eye when these things happen because, according to them, *boys will be boys*. They will be aggressive and assertive and they won’t cry. If something saddens them, they will just ignore it.

When people encourage boys to “man up”, rarely do they give a thought about the long-term impacts this will have. Do they think about the traumas the boys who were bullied for not being masculine enough will have to carry for the rest of their lives? Do they think about the effects that repression of emotions has?

I have been asking myself these questions for a long time.

Globally, more men than women chose to end their own lives. Research shows that the differences in the methods used by the different genders is one of the reasons behind this, but another cause has its roots in the aforementioned toxic gender roles. Because they have been conditioned into staying silent about their emotions, many men do not share their pain and worries with well-wishers. They bottle up their feelings and refuse to seek professional help. Not seeking help translates to no diagnosis and no treatment and things eventually get from bad to worse.

The venom of patriarchy affects anyone

who doesn’t comply with it and can, as we have already seen, even lead to violence and death. This is exactly why on November 19, discussions should take place on the ways in which we can raise awareness about how toxic gender roles imposed on men harm not just them, but also the people they surround themselves with. We should also keep in mind that these issues should not just be kept reserved for this date only. Even after this day ends, we will have to keep enlightening those around us on the need to tell their sons that it is okay to be emotional, it is okay to cry and it is necessary to be compassionate and understanding.

Let us start today. Let us talk about the terrible effects that toxic gender roles can have on people. Let us have discussions on the harms of repressing emotions and the necessity of seeking professional help for mental health problems. Let us delve deeper into the need to liberate not only women, but also men, from the clutches of patriarchy.

Happy International Men’s Day, once again!

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LIVING LIFE ON TWO WHEELS

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There is something inherently pleasurable about riding a bike. Ask any rider, why they do it. You’d meet a smiling face that says “for the love of it”. From speeding downhill to strolling solo, from racing in alleys to wandering in faraway wherever, the joys of cycling barely begin here.

It was not simply love that pulled these cyclists to the sport. For many it was the incentive of cutting back on their monthly transport budget and managing their finances better. Or, to get past the traffic jam.

As Rafsan Zia, 22, puts it “Cycling my way helps beat Dhaka’s insane traffic and is very cost-efficient”.

Teeshad Islam, 19, agrees to the same saying he never really has to torture himself being stuck in the situation. He also added that cycling gives him an edge of independence when he runs his daily errands. Cycling has become a very popular mode of transport, especially now, among students who are always on the run; they hop and pedal away past and in between cars and rickshaws in gridlocked roads. With looming deadlines and overloaded academic pressure allowing very little time for fitness activities, youngsters rely heavily on cycling to stay fit.

Some, like Zia, spare some time in the

morning solely for exercise apart from the daily pedalling. More students, like Raisul Habib, 23, rely on cycles for their part-time jobs such as food delivery services. On average, his job requires him to travel 15 kilometres daily to complete orders.

However, things have changed with the concurrence of a pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. The coronavirus crisis has impacted cycling activities in ways better and worse simultaneously. For the average Joe, the communicability of the disease has significantly reduced the miles pedalled in fears of being infected. However, the sales and use of bicycles has seen a surge; these rides have been strongly heeded as safer than public transportation. But it has become difficult to keep up with face masks on, as many have reported. On the other hand, in accordance with safety measures, adults and teenagers alike have taken the streets by storm. Be it competitive racing or savouring empty roads -- a cyclist’s surreal dream.

Despite cyclists burgeoning in the city there are hurdles to jump. While it is important that cyclists do their part, that is, wear safety helmets and maintain speeding limits, there are matters yet to be resolved which would ensure their safety and ease on road.

The dangers associated are certainly not minimal; road safety issues still

prevail. Rickety, broken roads and reckless four-wheelers leave no mercy for the riders. Cyclists need to be humanised on the streets.

Towsir Ahad Arnob, 22, thinks, “New laws should be put in place to ensure rider safety, laws that mandate use of headlight, brake light and reflectors.”

These gears are especially important for those who cycle at night as these enable them to be seen in the dark of the night. Parking spots to safeguard bikes is also a massive need. As bicycles end up huddling in the roads anyway, there might as well be a proper place to keep them. In addition, there is the ongoing talk about separate bicycle lanes for riders. Zia comments, “There aren’t many separate lanes for cyclists in and around Dhaka, safe for one in Agargaon.”

Hamida Akter Jeba, aged 24 above, who has won several cycling competitions in the country, too thinks that there should be separate lanes which would also serve to encourage females to partake. In her opinion, women on bicycles are not safe. Apart from drivers threatening to run over anyone, there are men who stare and catcall any moment they spot a female on a bike.

Although, “most women pretend not to hear or try to avoid these occurrences”, Jeba says “This is not the solution.”

She elaborates more on how challenging the activity and even, the sport, is for women by nature. At times, there is a lack of supportive, encouraging family members and peers; guardians often do not approve nor allow cycling for various reasons such as, safety concerns, societal judgement etc. Other times, the male gaze and eve-teasing hinder the decision of using bicycles.

As with every ride, there is always maintenance and repair. Different issues may arise anytime -- tire leaks, loose paddles, dysfunctional brakes, broken lights etc. Ahad suggests that owners do a quick check-up “every 15 days”. Irregularity in maintenance poses risks for the future and makes accidents and injuries likely.

Some started out as teeny tiny toddlers on tricycles, some sneaked out to practice while some skipped a step and rode on the two’s. What’s common among them is the love and zeal they share for cycling, no matter why they started out in the first place.

In the end, it all leads to a rider’s high and a lasting companionship. While problems persist, with more campaigns and awareness, cycling enthusiasts can be positively benefited.

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