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WHY MEENA IS A
FEMINIST ICON

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WEBINAR FATIGUE AND
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ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

EDITORIAL

I have an old National brand VHS player at home. Back in the 90s, my family was into Bangla and Indian television dramas, and the occasional film. TV shows that you wanted to watch again or have in collection – they needed to be stored in cassettes. I still have a few, in a box that’s somewhere in my house, safely tucked away.

I also have a Netflix subscription. It’s just an application on my phone, also available on my computer. It has separate accounts for each family member. TV shows and movies? Yes, it does have “quite a few” in its collection. Last I read, it had more than 12000 content on offer. I don’t have to worry about what to watch, nor do I have to worry about its safety; it’s password protected.

Technology, you beauty.

– Kazi Akib Bin Asad, In-charge, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

ANIME REVIEW



Of Heartbreak, Death and Closure

NISHAT TASNEEM SHAHARA

**Disclaimer: This article contains spoilers.*

Five minutes into the first episode of *Anohana*, I was prepared to chuck it.


The protagonist of the anime, Menma, is the perfect prepubescent Moe, who happens to be the love interest of Jinta, a reclusive teenager. Not a good pairing. But I’m glad I stuck around because *Anohana* just happens to be that rare slice-of-life series which transcends its genre and character tropes.

Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day is the product of a 2011 collaboration between Tatsuyuki Nagai and screenwriter Mari Okada. It is produced by the animation studio A-1 Picture that also made *FairyTail*, *Sword Art Online*, and *Kuroshitsuji* possible. Set in Japan’s city of Chichibu, *Anohana* builds onto the ambience of the setting and seamlessly weaves spiritual and supernatural elements into its plot. By supernatural elements, I mean Menma herself – or at least the spirit of ten-year old Menma who died back when Jinta and the friends were kids. The anime begins years after this tragedy, when her spirit suddenly appears in Jinta’s life, demanding him to help her transcend into the afterlife. Jinta begrudgingly decides to reach out to his childhood friends for help.

As the anime progresses, we see Jinta make an effort with the people in his life, confront his own traumas, and grow into

a better person. The only reason I can’t call Menma a manic pixie dream girl is because, well... she is dead. However, what truly sets this anime apart, is how it deals with its secondary characters. These characters are Anjou, Tsurumi, Atsumu and my favourite, Poppo. Each starts off as pretty basic one dimensional characters and the only thing that initially stands out is how diverse they were in the way they looked.

Soon enough, the comic scenes become sparse and the pretentiousness of the characters fall through to reveal the guilt that everyone felt at the wake of Menma’s death. It’s not only Jinta who comes in terms with his grief. It eventually ends up being a collective process for the entire group of estranged people. There are quite a few intense scenes as these characters finally succumb to their sorrow of losing a friend. *Anohana* is abundant with emotional and nostalgic elements, which can be a little too much for people not used to the genres of slice-of-life, drama, or tragedy. But for an anime that runs for eleven episodes only, the story is well paced and runs smoothly. The animation is simple and clean, complimenting the tone and characters perfectly – even though it has been almost a decade since it was created. The plot, the complex characters and even the animation remains relevant today, and can be pretty cathartic for viewers who have experienced losing a loved one.




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Why Meena Is A Feminist Icon

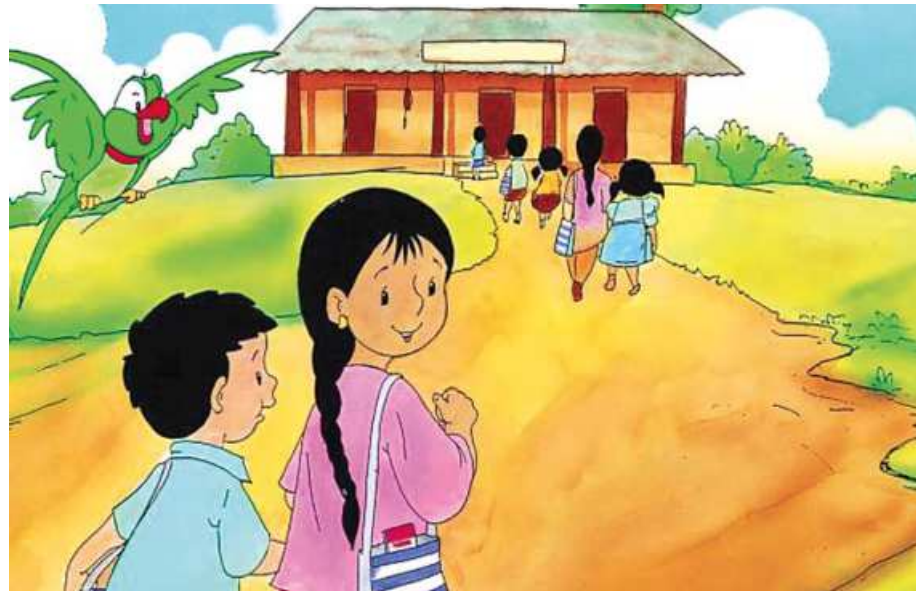
ADHORA AHMED

As a child, Meena was my alter ego. From time to time, I'd relapse into my obsession with her. If the scratches on my *Meena* DVD and extensive comic book collection are anything to go by, this cartoon is etched into my brain.

The recent ongoing conversations around patriarchy and misogyny made me realise how relevant Meena still is. I have to give her credit for teaching me things I probably wouldn't have learned at school, especially feminist causes. Let's look at three episodes and explore why this cartoon character is a feminist icon.

COUNT YOUR CHICKEN

One of the most iconic episodes of the cartoon is about one of the basic rights of every single human being: education. Meena wants to go to school, just like her brother Raju, but her parents see no point in an educated daughter. Because girls belong in the kitchen, right? *Wrong*, Meena rightfully thinks. With her brilliant mind, she defies patriarchal norms by sending her pet parrot Mithu to school, who imitates the lessons and relays them back to her. Her plan ultimately achieves more than her goal. She not only learns how to count, but also uses her new skill to catch a thief running off with one of their chickens. Her impressed parents learn a lesson, too -- ev-



ery girl should go to school, they *must*.

DIVIDING THE MANGO

In this episode, gender roles and inequality are questioned. Raju gets the bigger share of a ripe mango for breakfast, and a fuller plate at dinner. Why? Male privilege, of course. But, Meena does more household chores than him, so doesn't she deserve her fair share? Raju claims her work is too easy,

leading Meena to propose a challenge.

The siblings swap their workload the next day, but Raju regrets it very soon. He toils away the whole day, botching even the simplest of tasks. On the other hand, Meena enjoys a pretty relaxing day, other than struggling to tame their cow, Lali. By the end of the day, Raju is more empathetic towards Meena. The family, as a

whole, comes to value the importance of gender equality.

IT'S GOT TO BE A BOY

This episode addresses the problematic preference of male children in society. Meena's uncle is expecting a grandchild, but he's absolutely certain that it will be a grandson. His justification is that sons carry the name of the family, and can be anything they want. However, he is soon proven wrong when he discovers that the manager of his bank is a woman. He receives another blow when he learns that his newborn grandchild is a daughter. Meena introduces him to several self-sufficient women in the village, and shows off her mechanical skills when his tractor breaks down. At last, her uncle changes his sexist mindset, because he now knows that women are more than capable of doing everything men can.

Meena doesn't stop here. She raises awareness about child marriage, dowry, women entrepreneurship and female healthcare in other episodes. Perhaps it's time to binge on Meena again, and rekindle her spirit within us until we dismantle the patriarchy.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

BEING A JACK OF ALL TRADES



FARHAN ISLAM

It's a euphoric feeling for me every time I can help someone in a field they are not well acquainted with. Be it illustrating a poster for my elder sister's university programme or putting in hours of time teaching a junior how to give better speeches during debates.

The delight I get from their gratitude is enough to make my entire day, and that drives me to put more effort into improving whatever skill I have a fair grasp on. This delight pushes me forward to new experiences and higher levels, which I previously thought I could never cope with. Yet, somehow I always end up losing that drive for a plethora of reasons and circumstances; becoming unable to break through the glass ceilings whether those are self-made or not.

I believe an explanation for this is how I, and many of us in society, applaud signs of an objective form of tangible utility, achievement, and success. A lot of us initially focus on aiming for the zenith of whatever we dedicate our time to and the moment we realise what reality actually beholds in front of us, we pull ourselves back and contemplate the choices we made. Whether that reality comes in form of systematic barriers we have to face, or just simply the notion that we are not "good enough" and that there are millions of people who can contribute substantially more in the same avenues of interests and skills we have.

This is when the frustration kicks in, and we begin questioning ourselves while sulking over all our shortcomings. And that further leads on to asking ourselves "What is our purpose?" Because, we are equipped with so many things to offer others, yet we get lost at a certain point because of the ambivalence that is intimidated by these questions

we think of.

Hence, we do one of three things in response to this. Firstly, we might become stubborn and put in even more effort in one field particularly until that becomes an integral part of our lives. Secondly, we might convince ourselves to stay content being the person who can occasionally help others in a number of tasks because of our knowledge regarding those. And lastly, we might take a step back and opt for another new path; to seek a fresh beginning and test ourselves.

I believe the first two responses, regardless of whether it ends with someone becoming satisfied or not, bring a certain conclusion a person can adapt and make peace with. Whereas, the last one necessarily continues this cycle of looking for our purpose by gaining fresh knowledge and experience. We should not call this bad, because when we go through this all so familiar process again it feels revitalising and we get this new urge to learn more. As a result, we create more room to fill our enthusiasm, and that can uplift us to keep on striving forward yet again.

Although at some point in our lives we will have to limit our diverse range of expertise and settle for a primary option to pursue; being a "know-it-all" or a "jack of all trades" until that point is not futile. Because, we will still continue to go on these adventures to seek that significant purpose, so we need an incentive that brings joy to us in the process. For me, that incentive is being able to see people reward me with their appreciation for even the smallest of chores. And these people will still need us with our slightly above average skill set, to pitch in to make their lives slightly easier.

The writer is a high school graduate from BAF Shaheen College, Dhaka.

Webinar Fatigue and How To Deal With It

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Seminars can be exhausting, and it turns out that attending them from the comfort of your home doesn't make things any better. Seminars on the web – or webinars in short – are just as tiring, and taking part in such events frequently can lead to something called webinar fatigue.

What is webinar fatigue?

Webinar fatigue is a term that didn't exist until recently, and it refers to the feeling of tiredness or exhaustion that comes from attending too many webinars. It's a kind of burnout that you might have to deal with when you're having to sit through long webinars on a regular basis, either as a speaker, or an attendee. Although it's not yet treated as a medical condition, such cases of webinar fatigue can cause mental stress, and lead to disruption in your everyday routine, which is why it's important to understand how it can affect you and what you could do to shake it off.

How webinar fatigue can impact your life

Webinars require you to continuously stare at your screen for long periods of time. At this rate, you're basically overdoing on screen time, which is harmful in its own ways. Besides, exposure to such long sessions of commentary will completely drain



your energy, especially if it's something you're not all that interested in. Whether it's your academic, professional, or personal life, once that fatigue hits, you won't feel like doing anything else.

In addition to all this, webinars can also result in the accumulation of mental stress. You'll often find yourself assessing your own appearance during these live virtual sessions. This is a common case for the

organisers or speakers of these webinars. Many of them have to deal with multiple webinars in the span of a single week, or even a single day. The need to present yourself in the best possible way, every single time, is something that only adds to the problem, and can put you under stress even before the webinar starts.

Things you can do to avoid webinar fatigue

The best possible way to avoid webinar fatigue is by not attending them. Of course, in the current world order, doing so is nearly impossible. But what you can do, however, is be very selective about the ones you want to attend. Give yourself the time and space, and don't overdo it. If it's a webinar you can afford to skip, do so.

Make yourself as comfortable as possible for the webinars that you do end up attending. Take small breaks if you can, and avoid continuously staring at the screen as well. Ask the organisers beforehand if you can keep your webcam off during the webinar, or once you're done with your session and another speaker is talking. That way, you can give yourself a breather, walk around the room, and can also give yourself some space without having to worry about how presentable you're looking at that time.

Webinar fatigue is a common issue these days. But unlike the ongoing pandemic, you can actually drive it away. The key is to be selective, follow a "me first" policy, and give your body and mind enough rest before you attend your next webinar.

Faisal wants to be the very best, like no one ever was. To stay home is his real test, to survive the pandemic is the cause. Write to him at abir.afc@gmail.com

Online Competitions: A gamble or a gain?



FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

Is spending your time, effort and money on online competitions worth it? Today we find the answer.

Online competitions have recently gained uber-popularity and what sets them apart from offline tournaments, is the convenience and accessibility. Online competitions save you from the hassle of transportation. Coupled with the extreme time efficiency, online contests pave a way to getting used to remote working, which in this era, is the redefined future of work. Having said that, you miss out on the great opportunity of connecting with other brilliant minds that offline competitions have to offer.

Faria Hossain, an undergraduate student at Islamic University of Technology, shares her experience saying, "Online competitions can feel a little out of touch for me since it doesn't really provide a scope for networking." She further mentions how it helps her to get a taste of working in other sectors beyond her major which she would normally not opt for.

Like everything else in this world, competitions don't come cheap. Most of the competitions that you will participate in comes with a hefty registration fee. Now offline competitions may seem worth the money since it involves physical participation and service but this invites the obvious question, are we getting the best bang for our buck in the online ones?

To address this issue we sought the insight of Ifty Mahmud, Director of Finance and Marketing, Robotics Club of BRAC University. "Organising big events takes a lot of planning and effort. The prize money that we keep in the competitions come from the money we collect from the registration fees. Almost all if not more money goes into

promotions, boosting and hosting. Although it might look like you're paying for a single contest, there is a bigger picture." Moreover, registration fees prevent spam entries. "It filters out potential contestants," he adds.

Sponsorships are a big part of competitions as well. Not only do sponsorships help ease the financial burden, they also assist in gaining credibility and trust.

Khan Sharab Anan, Senior Executive Officer of Young Economists' Forum of North South University, comments, "It's a two-way street actually, we are trying to bring the best to the people and sponsors help us achieve that." The free entry contests are possible because of sponsorships.

Idea contests are a broad spectrum, from hackathons to case solving competitions, they really open up one's problem solving skills. Student competitions are a great way to squeeze out fresh ideas for brands and companies. Although a symbol of capitalism in today's market, these competitions are relevant and more integrated to normal life.

Adib Amob, a seasoned competitor from Bangladesh University of Professionals, remarks, "I find competitions interesting. Honestly, I find them more interactive than regular studies. The exploitation of ideas isn't ideal but it's kind of like paid internships. At least you're learning something!" Not everything is textbook learning, we learn along the way. Thinking out of the box by applying the knowledge we gain along the way gives learning purpose.

If you're still wondering what the point of investing in a competition is when it is not even certain that you will get something for the effort, think again!

Farnaz Fawad Hasan reads product labels when she's bored. Reach her at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com

Streaming Local, Dreaming Global

NABIHA NUSAIBA & ANTARA LABIBA NIKITA

As a teenager, we would often find ourselves surfing the internet on Opera Mini. If you, like us, had done the same, you will remember the various advertisements plastered on its homepage. One of the more frequently housed advertisements featured Grameenphone's Bioscope Live, a pioneering streaming platform in Bangladesh.

Back then, even the thought of exploring Bioscope was out of the question. Our devices and internet speeds simply would not allow it. Fast forward to 2020, a rapid shift in technology has allowed us to stream content with much ease and it almost feels like streaming content is all we do. Be it YouTube, Netflix, or Amazon Prime, a world of entertainment lies at our fingertips, whenever we want, wherever we want. Unfortunately, close to none of these sites host content based in Bangladesh, stripping Bangladeshis of access to their own culture. This is where Bangladeshi streaming sites come in.

Popular among such streaming platforms are Bioscope by Grameenphone, Robi TV+ by Robi, and Banglalink by Banglalink. Apart from platforms by the big telecom operators, there also exist local independent platforms such as Bongo BD and Cinematic. Just like Netflix or Hoichoi, these platforms host mostly local and some dubbed international movies and shows from third parties while also having a generous collection of exclusive content. However, this is where the similarities end.

Bangladeshi platforms have gone above and beyond to appease their consumers. Where many western cable channels reported damage to their audience base as more people shifted towards streaming platforms, Bangladeshi platforms like Bongo BD and Bioscope made ties with local cable channels and now live stream cable channel programmes from their platforms. Bioscope takes it even further and allows you to stream older programs from cable channels on its platform. This feature is especially great for non-resident Bangladeshis who cannot watch content in real-time given time zone differences and their limited Bangla channel options.

Almost all Bangladeshi streaming platforms allow access to parts of their catalogue free of charge. Compare that to Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu or Hoichoi, and you'll realise just how amazingly generous that is since none of them provide free content without a subscription. In a country where the market for streaming platforms is relatively new, you, the user, get to make an educated decision on whether or not a subscription is worth it. It should be noted, however, that the quality of premium content on most platforms is comparatively better than free material.

In terms of content quality, local streaming platforms are largely similar to local cable TV channels. However, the quality varies from show to show, channel to channel, and platform and platform.

It is particularly noticeable when one takes a look at the earliest content made, i.e. BTV dramas and shows from the beginning of the cable TV era. While commercial films have been heavily influenced by industries elsewhere, the dramas, for the most

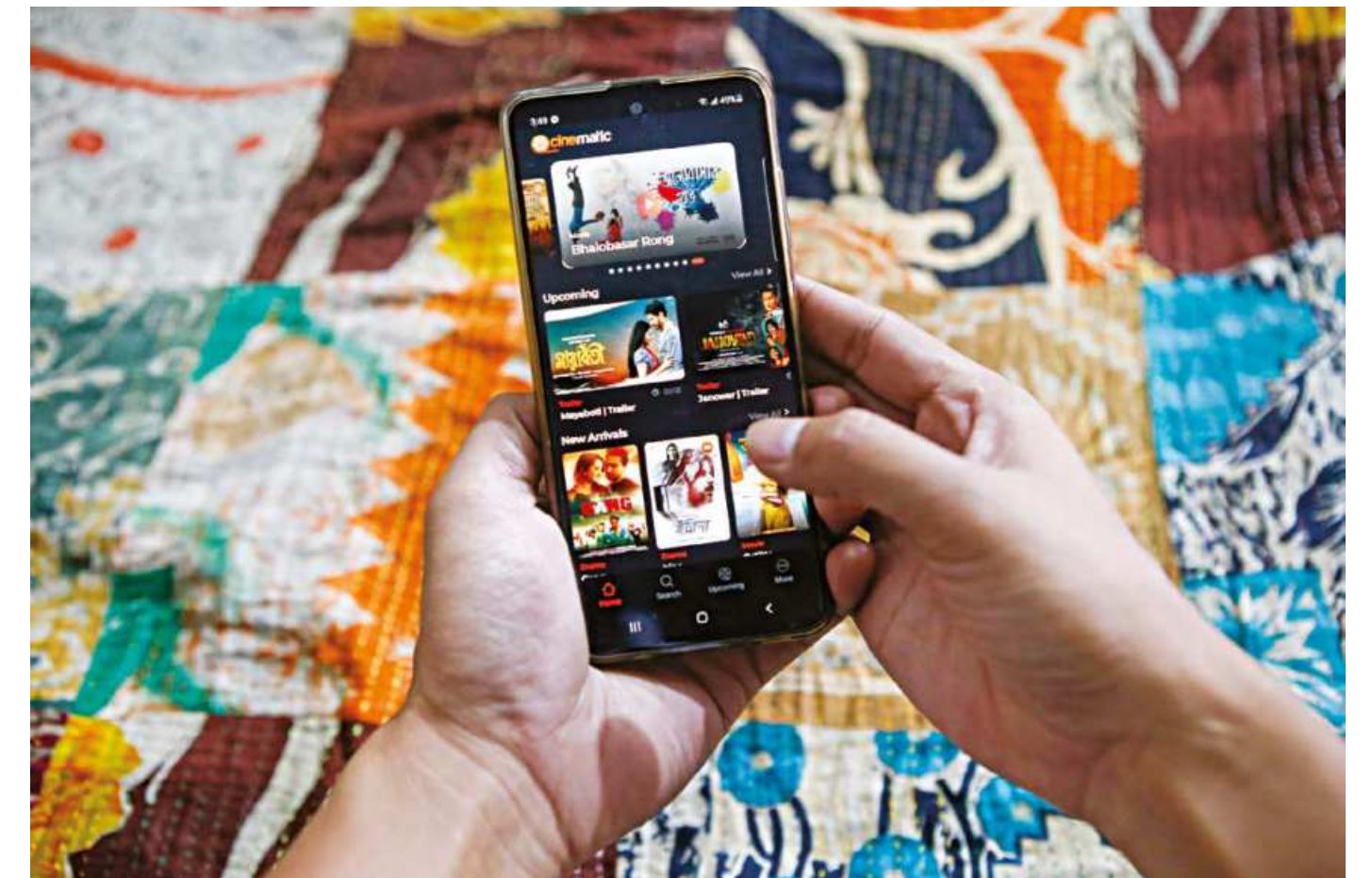


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

part, have remained grounded in the local context in terms of themes and plotlines explored. In a way, these *natoks* created the groundwork for the future industry. Just like cable channels, streaming platforms are working hard to cater to viewers from all walks of life.

Tamjid Atul, Director Marketing of Live Technologies, creator of the video on demand app "Cinematic", says, "Our content is created for people from all over the country. Our plots are set in urban, suburban, and rural locations and everything that falls in between."

But perhaps the most differentiating factor for local platforms is their effort to make streaming entertainment accessible to all. Not only are these platforms uniquely affordable, with the subscription fee being 9 taka for a day on Bioscope, but they also house a variety of payment methods. You can pay for your subscription through your credit or debit card, or mobile banking platforms such as bKash and Nogod and most conveniently, using your mobile balance. This proves to be a successful business strategy in a country where the infrastructure to pay online is still in its early stages. It should be noted, however, that platforms run by mobile telecoms may require you to have their SIM cards.

Even with such tremendous effort, not a lot of Bangladeshi youth report streaming content from local platforms. Jamal Abedin Vashkar talks to us about Bongo BD's effort to gain new subscribers during the pandemic.

"Between March and July all of our content was available entirely for free. Consequently, we gained new consumers and the views on our content increased. However, once this period was over and the subscription model was reintroduced, the number of users went down. This is because a

Bangladeshi audience is yet to embrace the concept of paying for content," says the Bongo BD Head of Content.

Redoan Rony, national award winning filmmaker and COO of OTT platform Chorki says, "People are paying for international content. People are watching Netflix and you can't pay cash, in fact you can't even pay in local currency, you have to pay in dollars through a credit card. So if people can manage to do that to watch international content, why can't they do that for local content?" This phenomenon could be due in part to the availability of better content with international platforms. Even though these have a higher subscription fee, their range, quality, and relatability may be more appealing to the youth.

Rameesa Jameel, a student at North South University, says, "Bioscope was, to my knowledge, the first completely local OTT platform. When I found out about it, it was just natural for me to check it out to offer support. I was interested in their adaptation of Satyajit Ray's fictional creation *Feluda*. Unfortunately, the adaptation didn't meet my expectations of quality content."

High school student Mahin Hossain, too, has queries about the quality. "I strongly feel like there's an opportunity for improvement in every corner. Most of the material I have come across felt recycled. It's the same conventional dramas with quite a lot of problematic aspects, like misogyny, toxic relationships," he says.

On the other hand, Sakib R Khan, Country Director for Hoichoi Technologies Bangladesh, speaks about what the platforms think fans want, "Thriller, crime drama and action-packed content is what the audience watches the most, with romantic comedies coming in at a close second."

Another probable reason for these platforms' slow rise to fame is the availability

of pirated copies of content on YouTube or piracy websites.

Redoan Rony says, "Quality content that gains popularity is illegally released on YouTube. This is the kind of content that brings in consumers and revenue. It is truly unfortunate to see this happen given that creators spend a long time and a huge budget when making these films and series."

Tamjid Atul echoes the same sentiment, "We haven't been able to garner a significant following as of yet because unlike other countries, where web series and movies are regulated and unavailable on YouTube, a lot of content is leaked here. I strongly believe we can improve our viewership if we can regulate the content on YouTube."

Moreover, the range of content offered by foreign platforms is unparalleled. For instance, Netflix has a vast catalogue that includes something for everyone: originals, anime, K-drama, telenovelas, TV series, movies, and more. These platforms offer content spanning different genres, cultures, and languages. Given the limited resources available to Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and content creators, it is not possible, at least not at the moment, to catch up to the larger platforms. Improvements in the content are certainly possible through larger budgets and bigger technological aid. Nonetheless, true advancement will only be possible if consumers stream their content, giving them that fighting chance.

Nabiha Nusaiba has a duel coming up with a bottle of Didaar tomato ketchup. Shoot her an email at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com for front row seats.

Antara Labiba Nikita is the coach to the above-mentioned bottle of ketchup. Send her an email at antarlalabiba7@gmail.com for information on her mentee.

Start-ups that are transforming the future of education

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Education. Many would agree that education is the backbone of a prospering nation. For a developing country like Bangladesh, education – for a long time – was more of a challenge than a success story. Almost 50 years since its independence, we have come a long way. And our education sector is enriching itself even more now, thanks to brilliant ideas and entrepreneurs.

There may be different methods in delivering and receiving education. However, what cannot be argued with is the fact that it is a basic human right, and it does not discriminate. Two start-ups, Study Buddy and Mymensingh Welfare School, work to provide education to those who need it the most, and in a very special way.

“Growing up with a sister having multiple learning disabilities, I wanted to come up with a solution for differently-abled children. My sister couldn’t cope in mainstream schools lacking proper governance and resources. When she passed away, I felt the urge to do something for children with special needs immediately. In a few months, with funds and support from many opportunities, I founded an edtech social venture to provide an alternative learning platform to children with learning disabilities and their parents,” introduces Sheikh Inzamamuzzaman, founder and CEO of Study Buddy.

Study Buddy aims to ensure equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for children with learning disabilities. But it is more than just that. The start-up targets to improve entire communities, especially parents and educators, to help and empower kids with learning disabilities. It proposes development of multiple intelligence among children.

Similarly, in 2017, Manas Kanti Saha and Urmi Saha established Mymensingh Welfare School, or MWS.

MWS has a simple approach. Through education, therapy and intervention, it aims to ensure inclusion of children with special needs.



“In Bangladesh, people with disabilities have insufficient opportunities to be included in mainstream education, economy and society. They don’t receive early intervention and proper planning to combat against their disabilities. Their potentialities and hidden skills are not being discovered by institutions or any experts. That’s why near about one tenth of the total population are at risk of economic exclusion,” explains Urmi Saha, Coordinator, MWS. Here, experts have been trying their best to find out the nature of disabilities to offer early intervention, positive parenting and strategic way of individualised education, to discover potentialities and to train children for economic and social inclusion.

Regardless, there are challenges in trying to serve for the good.

Inzamam mentions difficulties and technical issues. Especially during the pandemic, many students are not provided with the technology that online courses require, and thus fail to catch up with their classes. A change in the environment -- from traditional classroom and face-to-face training to computer-based, virtual training -- affected the learning experience.

On the other hand, MWS is located away from the capital. There, lack of awareness about their cause and their goal to establish a non-profitable platform turned

people away. Lack of skilled and empathetic manpower was also a big challenge. “But we never lost hope. We tried and tried to motivate the parents of the learners of Mymensingh Welfare School,” Urmi says.

Both Study Buddy and MWS dream of proper institutional facilities in the future, so that they can serve more children with disabilities. And in hindsight, a nation can also become disabled if it does not go with the times. That is where ANTT Robotics come in.

ANTT Robotics is a start-up geared towards STEM learning as part of education. It aims to enlighten the present generation with knowledge of programming and robotics to prepare them for the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Founder and VP, Innovation Thajid Ibna Rouf Uday shares, “The education system in Bangladesh has been maintaining the conservative approach for a long time, what was missing was the evolution of the education system according to the developing world. And we wanted to address that problem.”

ANTT Robotics aims to mobilise their services in the shortest possible time. However, according to them, the social stigma and perception towards science and technology, and inaccessibility of technology in rural areas, has been factors that result in slow progress.

UNDP Bangladesh and Youth Co:Lab, the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific co-created by UNDP and Citi Foundation, play an integral part in the growth of these start-ups, which include bootcamps and knowledge sessions, and more.

An extended version of this article is available online. Read it on The Daily Star website, or on SHOUT on Facebook and @shoutds on Instagram.

Kazi Akib Bin Asad is the editor in-charge of SHOUT. Write to him at akib.asad@thedailystar.net

The Fault with Our Paragraph Writing

REZAUL KARIM REZA

“Write a paragraph on traffic jams.”

Have you been asked to do so in school? I was too. My teacher sometimes asked me, “Write a SHORT paragraph on a winter morning.” A short paragraph! A paragraph on traffic jams or winter mornings! Today when I teach my students, it makes me think because the way I used to write paragraphs and how my teachers graded them violated the very definition of a paragraph.

Here is what the Cambridge Dictionary says about the definition of a paragraph: “A short part of a text that begins on a new line and consists of one or more sentences dealing with a single idea.” Oxford Learner’s Dictionary has been a bit more specific about the definition -- “a section of a piece of writing, usually consisting of several sentences dealing with a single subject. The first sentence of a paragraph starts on a new line.”

From these two credible definitions, we can assume that a paragraph should be very short, since it is part of a text. Often it is not more than a couple of sentences -- 3 is the best and 8 the maximum, according to dictionary.com. A paragraph should start with a new line of the idea. And then



it should introduce a second new line, but only if you intend to write a second paragraph. However, we are asked to write “a paragraph” in the examination. Isn’t it confusing?

Secondly, a paragraph should contain only one “single idea” which means I can only reflect one idea on a particular topic. It could be a reason, a solution, advice or a piece of information. Surprisingly, I wrote all the ideas in a single paragraph during

my school days. More surprisingly, my teachers graded them a solid A. Even today, many textbooks, guidebooks, and notebooks to academic solutions keep the practice going. If we look at such a paragraph from a book available in the market, we are confused about the definition.

At first glance, you can see it has more than three paragraphs sometimes, although the question was to write a paragraph. If you look and read closely again, you will

find that the so-called paragraph contains multiple ideas, including an introduction, causes, effects, and solution. Also, it has a lot of sentences. And the truth is all school paragraphs in all books are really very similar. Don’t they therefore violate the definition of a paragraph?

Writing paragraphs is important to invent new ideas, to help students be creative, and let them think in their own ways. It’s always appreciated that they should focus on new ideas and produce something of their own through writing. But, asking them to write a paragraph is not an appropriate question pattern and so, the trend should be changed.

Instead of asking the students to write a paragraph, we can be more specific in this regard. We may ask them to describe something they have seen, explain something they ponder, inform us something they like or dislike. That way they are free to write their own thoughts and create different ideas using several paragraphs on a single topic.

Rezaul Karim Reza is a freelance teacher in Rangpur whose work has previously appeared in Reader’s Digest.

Hair Fall Horror

LIYANA ESHAAL

The strands of black on my head
 More valuable than gold,
 They fall carelessly here and there, uncontrolled.
 I stare at them with sorrow in my eyes
 Scraping the fallen strands off my hair ties.
 Trust me, you're not the only one struggling for a trick,
 Even Prince William's bald spot shines with every click,
 Proving that hairfall horror is everyone's dread,
 We regret and regret all the hair that's been shed.

The writer is a student in grade 10 at Sir John Wilson School.



BAGHDAD DIARIES

FABIANA BINTE MESBAH

My eyes fling open. The lights are blinding white. *Where am I?* The pulse in my veins quickens. I can't feel my limbs, they are leaden against the bed. I struggle to tug at the tubes lining my arm; a numbing pain resides where they dig into the back of my hand. My head throbs as if it was crushed, then put together, but poorly. *What happened to me?* I want to call out for help; except my tongue is a rock trapped in my mouth and all that comes out is a muffled voice I don't recognise as my own. My heart is pounding faster now, so loud it drowns out the whirring ceiling fan. I break into a sweat. No, I'm too cold. But my entire being is burning in flames.

I can't breathe. I'm no longer on the hospital bed, the comforter tucked too tightly around me. I'm falling. I'm falling into a ceaseless pit, engulfed in darkness. I am sucked into the void as fast as I was spewed out from it.

6 MONTHS LATER

The elevator door wheezes open after a high-pitched ping and I step inside, looking at the tip of my shoes while others flood in behind me.

"Good work in Baghdad, agent," a suit-clad gentleman pats my shoulder as we begin the ascent.

I shoot him a perplexed glance and am about to say, "*You've mistaken me with someone else,*" when an older man, positioned at the back of the elevator clears his throat and begins, "Agents, thank you all for assembling at such short notice. It is a time of crisis and we need all hands on deck."

Baghdad? Agents? I jab at the "Open Doors" button as the elevator crosses my stop – the publication office on the third floor of the building. My mind goes into a frenzy of confusion and apprehension as the strangers surrounding me murmur in soft, definitive tones. I catch the older man's eyes and they glint back in understanding, empathy. He holds my gaze for a beat too long which tells me his warm eyes and thick-rimmed glasses have seen more than they let on.

Then it hits me, *he knows*. He knows why I have no memory of my life before the past spring, why all the laughing faces in my photo frames are anonymous to me. He knows what terrors induced the scars on my body – the terrors I only see glimpses of in my nightmares.

We stop at the seventh floor of the building, formerly known to me as the substandard convenience store which attracted customers once in a blue moon. The man, supposedly the head of this group, leads us towards the far end. He opens a rusting door via a retinal scanner obscured



behind an expired fire extinguisher; the assembly trails behind him with an air of discipline and conviction, evident that they are well-accustomed with the ongoing procedures and the uncertainty awaiting us.

I inch forward, taking in the rows of immaculate cubicles. Their occupants take no notice of us as they continue to type undecipherable words into monitors or dictate panicked, yet stern, instructions into headsets. We file into a conference room where, moments later, the man approaches to shake my hand. "I'm Harold Scherbatsky," he chuckles, "you used to call me Harry. It's an honour to have you here with us."

He directs my sight towards the projector screen, and I let out a baffled gasp. A picture of me is displayed – I look much younger, my eyes are gleaming with confidence and pride, my shoulders are relaxed under the crisp uniform

I am dressed in. The next images are foreign to me, and yet uncannily familiar: a dilapidated shack against a dusty backdrop with the peak of a mosque visible in the distance and the other – my body, bloody and injured, sprawled across the ground.

Then the memories come back.

My vision is foggy, my bones battered and tied to the chair. A single light bulb dangles from the ceiling, under which the men brandish their iron rods and whips. One of them comes forward. He speaks in a foreign language, chastising me, I suppose. He then brings down his baton on my head, a coup de main meant to dismantle the entire network of spies dotting eastern Baghdad.

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PATCHWORK

Sewn, glued, slapped on top,
Out we come from a working shop.
Imperfect patchworks, perfectly made
Behold! The world is a masquerade.

PHOTO: KAZI MUHAIMINUL ISLAM MUNAJ
TEXT: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

