

Death penalty is not the answer

The need of the hour is rehabilitating sex offenders and including men in the dialogue of gender-based violence



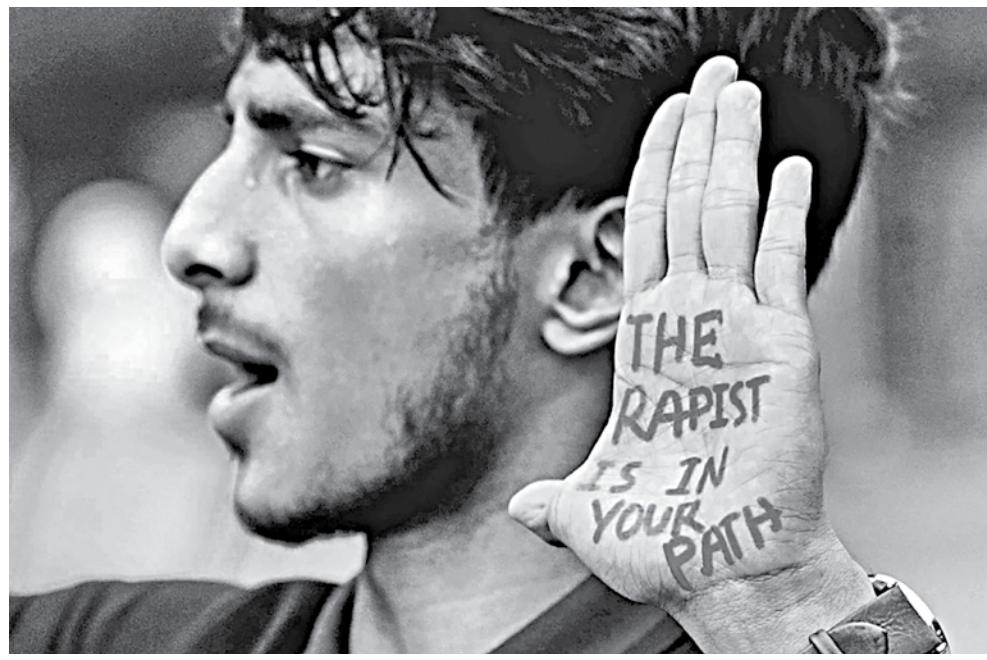
DR MADHUMITA PANDEY

SEXUAL violence and the fear of sexual abuse can have a profound and devastating effect on not only individuals but entire communities. When approaching the subject of criminality, the easiest way to look at criminals is from the hero and villain duality, wherein criminals are simply the "bad guys". The idea of a criminal brings to mind someone who is essentially flawed with a deviant nature. It helps create the idea of "us"—the law-abiding do-gooders and "them"—the wicked lot, and through this division, individuals (in the "us" group) find an easy way to blame all that is wrong in society on "them" without having to ever look inwards. In an article for *The Daily Star*, Shuprova Tasneem argues: "And finally, once you figure out the laws of the land do not apply to you and you can abuse your power in the most monstrous of ways—by violating another human being's body without facing any consequences—then who will answer for creating monsters like you?"

The same sentiment was also seen during the nationwide protests following the 2012 Delhi gang-rape case, with politicians and authorities labelling the rapists as "monsters" who, according to them, did not represent the majority of the Indian populace. But is it really that straightforward? It is often difficult to "describe" who is a rapist, particularly outside of the legal definition. So, let's look at who is not. In some scriptures such as Deuteronomy, it is outlined that he's not a rapist if the woman didn't scream. Many judicial systems, including the one in Bangladesh, will say he's not a rapist if he's your husband (a national survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2015 found that at least 27 percent of the 20,000 married women surveyed had experienced sexual violence by their husbands). While only a handful, many also say that he's not a rapist if he marries you soon after and protects your honour. Many people who are an integral part of the criminal justice system such as police officers and judges may

also have a myriad of rape myths that assist them in deciding who is not a rapist: perhaps well-educated men, famous men, rich men, men who have never raped before, men who didn't commit any physical violence or had any weapons, men who claim they had had previous consensual sex with the victim... the list is never ending.

But here's the interesting thing: when Dr Samuel D Smithyman in 1976 sent a personal ad in the newspaper throughout Los Angeles that he wants to interview rapists anonymously over the phone, he was surprised to see how normal they sounded and how diverse their backgrounds were. This became the foundation of his thesis titled, "The Undetected Rapist". In my own research, for which I interviewed 100 convicted rapists in Delhi's Tihar Jail, it was found that traditional gender roles in India had led to the formation of negative and oppressive societal attitudes towards women, which continue to persist till today and their extreme manifestation can be witnessed in the form of sexual violence. Furthermore, there is a widespread perception that rapists as a group tend to hold more oppressive attitudes towards women. However, comparative findings from the interviews of



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convicted rapists and convicted murderers revealed no significant differences in the way gender was socialised.

In my sample of convicted offenders, home was the main gender socialisation site and the mother was central to this process. At the same time, both groups of offenders differed with respect to their self-perceptions of offending. Rapists referred to themselves as "innates" and non-sex offenders referred to themselves as "offenders". Non-sex offenders accepted responsibility for their actions but attempted to justify their intent, whereas rapists denied responsibility and attributed blame to the victim. Rapists also used various identity-management mechanisms to reject the label of "rapist". The increased debates about sexual violence in South Asia, coupled with the lack of research on convicted sex offenders (particularly rapists), has demonised this group of offenders and accorded them a somewhat "extraordinary" status. These men are not special. They are not different. They are

not sick or mad.

Fast forward to the present and the same reality is reflected even today. Women have voiced their harrowing stories in light of the #MeToo movement and the profiles of the accused are so varied that it is difficult to generate a prototype. Therefore, we must first and foremost accept this existential truth that most rapists look and behave like everyone else. In a patriarchal society, men are learning to have false ideas about masculinity and sexual privilege, and women also learn to be submissive. It is easy to think that there's something inherently wrong with the rapists. However, it is important to note that these men are not aliens who've been brought in from another world. They are also a part of our society and have developed through the same gender and sexuality norms. Therefore, challenging concepts of patriarchy and traditional masculinity does not only benefit women but also men. When we think about gender equality, we straightaway think about

women's empowerment but we often forget that in our fight for gender equality, men need to play a very important role.

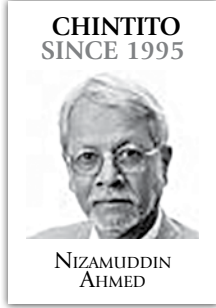
Public outrage often leads to more punitive measures towards combatting sexual violence where keeping convicted sex offenders in prison for longer may seem appealing but in reality, this doesn't contribute towards reducing the risk of reoffending. There are many factors associated with reoffending such as social and emotional isolation, unemployment or not having something meaningful to do in life. While it is a bitter pill to swallow for the public when it comes to rehabilitating sex offenders, the hardest fact that we must face is that the vast majority of sex offenders will one day be released and we need to provide support for their reintegration in order to avoid reoffending and reduce future victimisation.

If you think about the recent public and policy responses to rape in Bangladesh, you will find that there is a strong call for stricter/harsher punishments and that's about it. This means that a strong response in the pre-conviction stage for harsher punishments will ultimately lead to more convicts in already overcrowded prisons which will make it harder to develop and implement rehabilitation programmes. And once released, men with previous sexual convictions would once again have no support or training to manage their misplaced sexual and gendered notions, making way for reoffending. Promoting prison reform remains challenging in Bangladesh as the function of imprisonment in the Bangladeshi justice system is exclusion from society, and prisoners are almost totally isolated from the outside world. However, the answer to combatting sexual violence—rape, in particular—is to develop programmes that can utilise an offender's conviction time effectively by challenging gender myths and stereotypes, addressing their misplaced notions of masculinity and providing them with a safe environment to not only speak about their crimes but also reflect on them.

Dr Madhumita Pandey is Lecturer in Criminology, Sheffield Hallam University. Her doctoral research explored gender socialisation and perceptions of culpability in the narratives of convicted violent offenders from Delhi prison based on interviews with over 100 convicts.

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The humility of the greats, and the pathetic flip side



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

CELEBRATED Pakistan national footballer and Bangladesh national coach Golam Sarwar aka Tipu, who famously played mostly for Dhaka Mohammedan Sporting, was one among the 23 Bengalis who represented

Pakistan during the 24 years of East-West coexistence. He narrated the following anecdote.

Soon after our decisive victory in the 1971 Liberation War, the visiting Bangladesh Customs footballers were accorded a somewhat grand reception at Calcutta by their Indian counterparts.

To their disbelief, to felicitate them, in attendance was the doyen of Indian music, the legendary Hemanta Mukhopadhyay. Their youth was replete with Hemant Kumar's rendition of Tagore's *Shyama* and *Chitrangada*... Oh, how many times they hummed his *Ei meghla dine ekla, Muche jawa dinguli*...

Golam Sarwar and a teammate eagerly approached the living icon Hemant Kumar, and sought his autograph. Further was their disbelief when the maestro apologised, stating in all modesty, that it was the footballers who were the guests of the day, and his giving an autograph would be inappropriate for the occasion. A worthy professional had spoken. A steady head crowned a thousand times is the sign of a respectable man.

Doyen of Bangladesh theatre, Aly Zaker (Chotlu Bhai), was my favourite "chief personality" for all occasions. Not because he

excelled as Dewan Gazi, but he always said, "yes" to every good cause, exemplified by his participation in the Liberation War of 1971. He made me believe, always with a disarming smile, that we were doing him a favour instead of it being the other way round.

He made himself available when I was Assistant Provost at Buet's Suhrawardy Hall to grace the Cultural Week. All it took was one phone call. "Chotlu Bhai, should I send a transport to pick you up", in response to which the theatre icon's warmth could be felt

Aly Zaker, the "boss" of Asiatic, one of the more successful advertisement houses.

He was at Banani in July 2013 to split the ribbon at the launch of my daughter's designer boutique, "Andeem", along with *mishiti meye*, Kabori Sarwar. I call her Khala. It's complicated.

He was my first guest at Chintito, a TV series on ATN Bangla, based on this very column that I hosted in 2016. No questions asked, he just came, of course on his own. He had tremendous respect for people who

Jadugar abandoned a materialistic lifestyle and embraced nature by adopting the "small is beautiful" regime, a Leopold Kohr (1909-1994) principle, made popular by his economics pupil EF Schumacher's book by that name. Akku, as I call him, is a self-proclaimed global citizen with hashtags *joi manush* (victory to mankind) and *joi prokriti* (nature).

In 2017, he chose to be in a remote village—a strange country, community and language. He and his partner overcame the rugged mountains, the biting cold of the Himalayas, and water paucity to handcraft in stone a cast-in-situ restaurant and a guest lodging, evolving from the earth and stones of the site. With Architect Babu Ram Bhandari, they have adhered to the four R's: Recycle, Re-use, Renovate and Refurbish, showing remarkable restraint.

On the occasion of Independence Day 2020, as in every other year, our Ekattur Open Scout Group, wanted to hear the stories of a freedom fighter. I called up Akku long distance, and he was on Zoom on time to celebrate *suadhinata* with this generation. No fuss.

That generation was a special edition. Among the protagonists, I cannot name cousin Asaduzzaman Noor for the shame of being accused of nepotism. But, crooner Shahnaz Rahmatullah, actor and my teacher Professor Dr Enamul Haque Sir, and Dhaka Theatre's Pijush Bandyopadhyay required no more than a phone call to grant their consent to glorify an occasion. No pretence, nor coquetry or falsity.

Ironically, that bundle of goodness is pathetically in short supply among the apprentices they innocently embraced, and yes sweated to groom. No sooner do some of the greenhorns find "twinkle-dom", thanks primarily to the 50 hungry TV channels, they

build a facade of wile and fuss. The hoopla around them on social media is suspected to be their own creation.

The flickering stars do not readily consent to a programme or an invitation for security reasons, fearing either a stampede of fans or of becoming cheap. They yearn for more attention to quench their avarice, and yet are unprepared to meet the public "unprepared". Alas, they had so much more value to add.

They cannot recite impromptu a few lines on television because they do not nurture their talent. They cannot sing if caught off-guard or without their regular hands of musicians. Organisers often face a mafia of back scratchers. "I do not go *kothao* without Omuk Bhai and Shomuk Da."

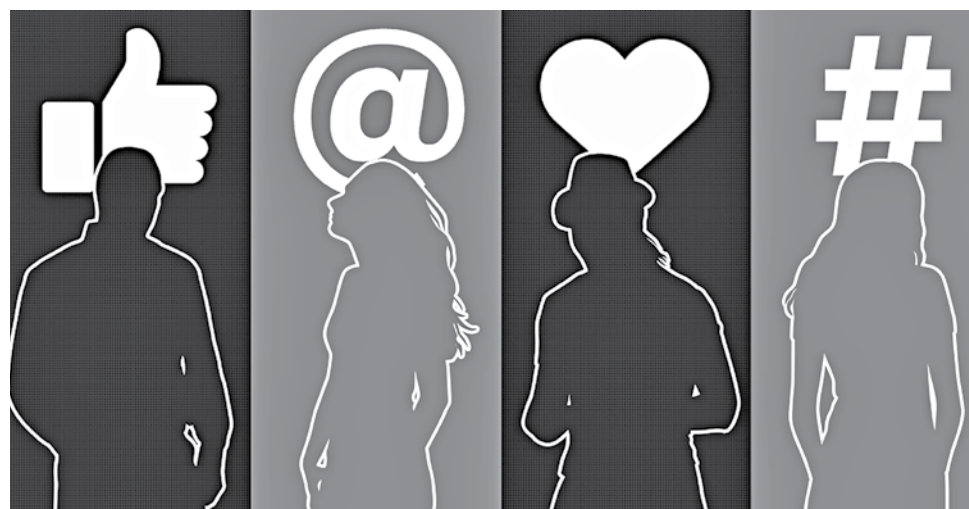
It is saddening that success should turn their head so when only the world was beckoning. They could not fathom the road of further success. The novices are afraid someone may steal their glory. Many are lost before they emerge from the jungle.

Only the vulnerable create layers of barriers to conceal their apparent inadequacy. Lasting fame comes with humility and quality, modesty and perseverance, simplicity and talent. Value is never decreased by spending goodwill.

On receiving accolades, it's not decent, nor right to pick up all the bananas, milk and *gur* into one's own bowl, now suddenly a bigger bucket. Remembrance of the valued contributions of parents, schoolteachers, relatives, friends and family, and mentors is their right.

There is a vast contrast between "I deserve it" and "they think that I do". Maturity is comprehending and realising the difference.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.



on my receiver, "Arrey, nah! I will be able to come on my own". (click)

To raise funds for the treatment of a student, we arranged the staging of Nagorik's *Dewan Gazir Kissa* at the Buet's air-conditioned auditorium. It took not more than five minutes between us to decide on the dates, the costs, and the show. Nagorik chipped in too. That was the charisma of Mr

honoured him.

For the last few years Muktijoddha Akku Chowdhury has been literally building a castle up in the air. After several successful and otherwise bouts with entrepreneurship in his motherland, a "best" son of the soil pitched tent to create a Retreat for Conscience at Deumaudi, Pokhara, Nepal. The Founder-Trustee of Muktijuddha

QUOTABLE Quote

RICHARD BACH
(Born: 1936)
American author.

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world the master calls a butterfly.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Prejudice
5 Highway
9 Tubular pasta
10 Church fixture
12 Grammar topic
13 Six in a carol
14 Eleven in a carol
16 Cry of insight
17 Pop star
18 Spread rumors
21 Was a pioneer
22 Fuse together
23 Ten in a carol
24 Precipices
26 Manual alphabet: Abbr.
29 Oath
30 Opposed to
31 Long, long time

DOWN
1 Next to
2 Like two peas –
3 Christmas tree topper
4 Oracle
5 Cloth scrap
6 Flamenco cry
7 Relaxed
8 One of Santa's team
9 Eye part
11 Enjoy a novel

32 Nine in a carol
34 One of Santa's team
38 Private teacher
39 Snares
40 Hound's hands
41 Snaky fish

15 Breathing tube
19 Carmaker
20 Passport, license, etc.
22 Carol, for example
23 Pot part
24 Enlarge
25 Soprano Scotto member
26 Menagerie
27 Brews, as tea
28 Kids mail them to Santa
29 Nuisance
30 Dote on
33 Entr' –
35 Right away
36 Fourth-yr. students

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	P	O	T	C	R	A	P	S
H	U	M	A	N	L	U	M	E
A	R	E	N	A	A	G	A	T
G	E	L	S	T	Y	Z	I	P
S	E	E	S	T	O	B	E	T
S	T	A	I	R	C	A	S	E
D	E	P	O	T				
S	T	A	R	E	D	O	N	S
S	H	U	T	D	E	N	I	E
T	A	X	M	O	I	S	O	C
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R	A	D	O	N	E	L	T	O
K	N	O	T	S	L	O	N	E

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHAT ARE YOU WRITING?
I JUST GOT AN IDEA FOR THE ARTICLE I'M WRITING FOR ARMY TIMES
MY DEADLINE IS TOMORROW

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

LISTEN UP, EVERYBODY.
WE'RE RUNNING LATE, SO YOUR DAD IS GOING TO HELP YOU GUYS GET READY THIS MORNING.
THIS ISN'T "PJAMA DAY" BY ANY LUCKY CHANCE, IS IT?
WE'RE DOOMED!