

Dhaka Day by Day

The Servant Problem: Who is to Blame?

by Farah Ghuznavi

If, as it's often stated, the most common subject of conversation in Britain is the weather, then it's probably true that the subject most often on the mind of the average middle-class Bengali is the servant problem. This is a ubiquitous topic, and tends to crop up in every social circle that can afford to have servants — from intellectuals to business people to professionals and wage earners, and so on. Given that it is hard to find good help, might it be worthwhile to look into the causes of this problem?

In the majority of the discussions heard, the onus of blame has always been on the servants, but I would like to suggest that we take a look at the other side of the story as well. Could it be that the problem is not just with the servants of today, but our treatment of them?

Many of the people seen complaining in this fashion are often also those who treat their servants rather badly. They range from people who are "merely" unpleasant with those who work for them, to those who are downright cruel. This is perhaps a light look at what is intrinsically a very serious subject, but it's a fact that many people just don't treat their servants like human beings. Perhaps if they did, they would have fewer problems with them!

One of the women who worked at our house told how the man of the household where she had worked before regularly got drunk and beat her up. He had two children whom she used to try and protect from the worst of his rages, and that is what got her beaten most frequently. Yet she assured that he was a very nice man when he was sober, and she certainly adored the two little girls, which is perhaps why she put up with it for as long as she did. In yet another place where she worked, they refused to give her enough to eat, and paid her so little that she could not afford to buy extra food. As a result, she often ate pieces of brick and coal to fill her stomach. To this day, she gets the craving to gnaw at a piece of brick every now and then!

On a happier note, one of the most enjoyable things about getting to know your servants as people (apart from it being common human decency) is being able to hear some of the stories they have to tell. Unlike the two stories above, not all of them are negative. A friend's ayah told us how embarrassed she was at the gaffe she committed when she first started working in their house and was told to bring some tea with *rasagollas*. When she actually served the tea, there was a *rasagolla* floating in each cup. She couldn't understand why everyone started laughing...

Similarly, Raju, who used to work for us, would have fits of laughter when he was reminded of the first dinner party where he served drinks. In the midst of serving the wife of one of the ambassadors, he suddenly noticed a large cockroach perched on a curtain, preparing to divebomb the food. With great presence of mind, but alas little subtlety, he took the most direct route in order to grab the cockroach. Not only did he almost run over Madame Ambassador (who was very understanding about the whole thing), but he also managed to attract the attention of practically everyone at the party to the cockroach!

Raju is now working in Kuwait, but he still writes to us occasionally, to send his regard (and reduce his homesickness, I suspect!). But with all the memories we have of him we are unlikely to forget him in a hurry! He had given us sufficient notice before he left, and while we were sorry to see him leave, we were happy that he had managed to take advantage of this opportunity.

Yet most people appear only to have the most horrific stories to tell. Which basically brings us back to the original point. That is, while not attempting to deny the truth in some of these stories, in most cases, treating the people who work for you as human beings rather than slaves can often bring out the best in everyone concerned. At the very least, we could look at it this way: one should try everything in life once.



What's on today . . .

Jojon reception: Jojon, a contemporary art gallery, will accord reception to artist Devdas Chakrabarti on the occasion of his second anniversary. It has also organised an exhibition by five young artists. Venue: Gallery premises, 74, Central Road. Time: 6:30 pm. Chief guest: Artist Mustafa Monowar. The show is open everyday from 3 to 8 pm through April 26.

Prize-giving ceremony: Certificates and awards will be distributed among the winners of the Qazi Momen Memorial Scholarship, 1994. Venue: Morning Star Kindergarten premises, 227, Ahmednagar, Mirpur. Time: 3 pm.

Inaugural ceremony: The newly-constructed auditorium of Kendriya Kanchi-Kanchar Mela, a children's organisation, will be opened. Venue: 58/1A, Purana Paltan. Time: 5 pm. Poet Sufia Kamal will preside.



Painting show: The solo painting exhibition of Sunil Howladar will open. Venue: Gallery Tone, Dhanmondi. Time: 5:30 pm. Charge d'Affaires of Switzerland, Albert Mehr, will inaugurate. The show is open everyday from 10 am to 8 pm till April 29.

Asiatic Society talk: A lecture on 'Women's Movement in South Asia: Modes of Resistance' as part of the Mustafizur Rahman Khan and Salaha Khanam Trust Fund Lecture 1994. Venue: Seminar room of the society. Time: 4:30 pm.

Lions Club of Dhaka Lalbagh: A general meeting to elect the club executives for the year 1995-96 will be held. Venue: Purbani Hotel. Time: 5 pm.

Opening of music school bldg: A new branch of the Surabani Music School will open. Venue: Don Grammar School, Road 35, House 36, Gulshan 1/2. Time: 6:30 pm.

Rotary Club of Dilkusha: The charter presentation ceremony of the club will be held. Venue: Purbani Hotel. Time: 6 pm. Nobel laureate Mother Teresa is expected to attend.

Int'l confce: The inaugural session of the international conference on economic, social and cultural rights will be held. Venue: DU TSC auditorium. Time: 9 am. Minister for Education Zamiruddin Sircar will inaugurate.

BBC expert in city

Prof John Jawroski, Director of Educational Television of BBC, arrived in the city Wednesday to conduct a two-week workshop of Bangladesh Open University beginning tomorrow, reports UNB.

The Open University has arranged the workshop on Audio Visual Teaching Materials with the financial assistance of the British Council, said a press release yesterday.

DU confers PhD, M Phil degrees

By Staff Correspondent
The Dhaka University has awarded PhD degree to 12 and M Phil to two researchers.

The researchers who have got PhD are: Mohammad Zahid Hossain and Abul Ahsan Chowdhury of Bengali Department, Akhtari Khanom of Economics, Md Mohiuddin Abdullah and Mohammad Abdul Wahab of Public Administration, M Rais Uddin Miah of Chemistry, Khabir Ahmed and Imdadul Haq of Zoology, Rahima Khatun and M A Sobhan of Botany, Fazle Ali and Kamrul Ahsan of Soil Science Department.

Besides, Dr Tahmina Khatun and Dr S M Mostafizur Rahman of the Institute of Food and Nutrition obtained M Phil degree.

The DU Syndicate awarded the degrees following the recommendation of the Academic Council of the University, said a press release yesterday.

Obituary

Rabiya Khatoon, mother of veteran freedom fighter and founder of the JSD late Major (Retd) M A Jalil, died yesterday noon at her daughter's Jhalakati residence. She was 78, reports BSS.

Family sources in Dhaka said that she will be buried today at Jhalakati.

Rabiya Khatoon had not been well since the death of her only son Major Jalil in 1989.

A large number of people visited her daughter's residence to pay their last respects.

Death anniversary

The 24th death anniversary of Shaheed Captain (Retd) Ahsanullah Chowdhury will be observed today. On this day in 1971 he was picked up by the Pakistan Army from the Chittagong Circuit House and later killed, says a press release.

Qurankhwani and a milad mahfil will be held in Chittagong in the evening on the occasion. Late Captain Chowdhury had left behind his wife, three minor sons and three daughters. One of his sons Shahjahan Chowdhury is now a Lt Colonel in the Bangladesh Army.

Seminar on fisheries held

By Staff Correspondent

Fish population was declining in the country due to over fishing, observed an Australian anthropologist in the city yesterday.

Speaking at a seminar, Dr Bob Pokrant, currently work-

ing in Bangladesh, listed that enhanced commercial interest of the middlemen, leaseholders and the fish traders were the main reasons behind fish depletion in the country.

He expressed his views

while giving a key-note speech at a seminar on "The fisheries of Bangladesh" organised by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS).

The seminar was held at the library of the centre.

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Share the secret this Eid-ul-Azha



SHEMAI
Preparation Time: 5 minutes
Cooking Time: 10 minutes
To serve 6-8

Ingredients
Blue Cross : 1/2 tin
Semai : 50 gm
Nespray full cream powder milk : 1/2 litre
Raisins : 2 tbsp
Nuts : 2 tbsp
Blacks : 2, finely powdered
Dissolved Zaffran : 1 tsp (optional)

Method
Bring milk to boil. Add Blue Cross, Semai and Raisins.
Cook for 2 to 3 minutes and top with raisins, nuts and saffron.
Serve hot.

Quick Tip
Roast Semai lightly in 1 to 2 cup of ghee before adding milk, if it is not the roasted variety.



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