



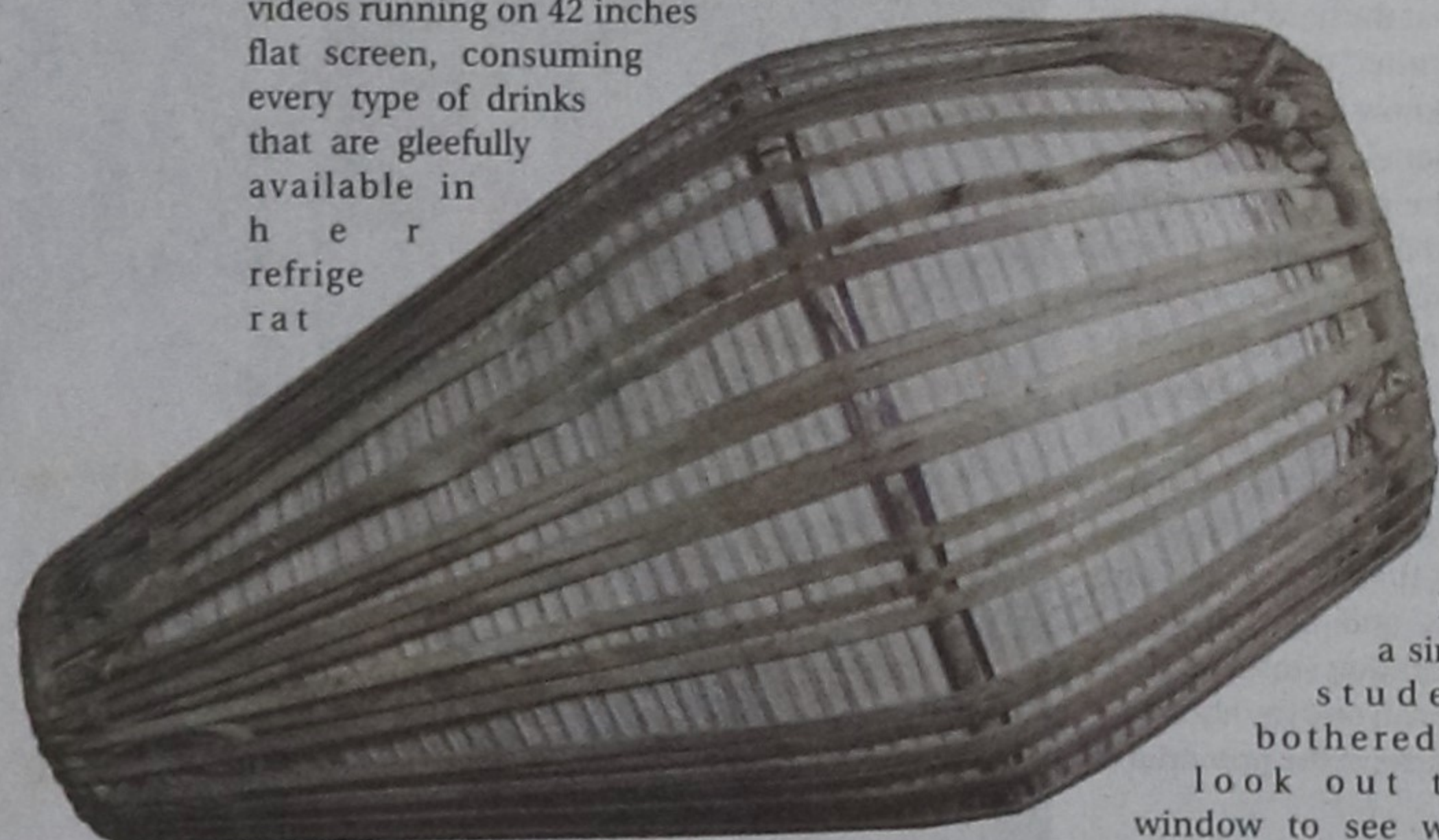
A moment to act!

FAHEEM HASAN SHAHED

DAUGHTER of a rich dad, 15 year-old Riya (not her real name) studies in a posh school in Dhaka. She has lots of things in her passion-of-my-life list that she loves doing consistently, among which 'partying with friends' stands at the top.

She arranges parties twice every week with a bunch of pretty boys and girls as her ever-willing guests. And what're those parties all about? Wait a minute, ask me what they aren't.

Dancing with hot, steamy music videos running on 42 inches flat screen, consuming every type of drinks that are gleefully available in her refrigerator



OR, engaging in relentless chaotic yelling of Yankee slangs, and finally..... Well, that I leave to your noble imagination.

This is a common 'fun' that is meticulously being relished by the entire group of 'young people' of her posh localities, and mind it, the members of this group are increasing like pop corn.

You may wonder what the parents of that girl do! Haven't they got any control on her? They could have, but where is their time for that if they keep using their residence like a guest house?

In 2001, a school bus of another prominent institution on its way to

school suddenly met with an accident in Mohakhali. The bus accidentally hit a tempo causing that to overturn and injure the passengers out of whom most were female garments workers.

Seeing the empty road, the driver speeded the bus to escape either a police case or a 'ghoosh-giving ceremony', leaving the crying ladies lying on the road along with their torments.

The students sitting inside the bus kept doing what they were doing: chatting among themselves.

Were they members of our youth culture? By the word 'our', I mean 'quintessentially of Bangladeshi Bangalee'.

I knew the answer: NO. They looked Bangladeshi due to their appearance and also due to the fact that physically they existed in Bangladesh.

But emotionally? When they came out on the crowded streets of Dhaka, when they breathed the moisture-laden air of Dhaka, when they watched the dusty pavements and nagging beggars at the traffic stops, when they looked at the office-people waiting for the buses to return home after day's work, did they discover the environment anywhere which they had been so fond of: the realm of spicy slangs and colourful parties, boorish raps and heavy metals, gambles and turbo-engine carriages?

They didn't. And that's where the vulnerability of their psychological existence lied. They did not belong to the society they existed, and the society they craved for did not exist around them.

Such ruthless ordeal of humanity, I thought. I understood that they were in search of tranquility of their souls, something so brutally ravaged by the dilemma artificially created by their environment. Peace had never been so cheap a material that even normal people could buy anytime, let alone these boys!

The looks in their eyes seemed paler to me, and I felt frustration in my heart.

proudly bursting out in their appearances.

But, I discovered a clear helplessness in their eyes. They were searching for something. But what was that?

My friend stopped his car nearby just for 10 minutes to buy fuchka. As I came out too, I managed to overhear their talks. Well, they had been talking in a language that was alien to me. I only understood that it was predominantly English without any 'English' in it.

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'What are you going to do with them, Bangladesh?' I asked silently.

Bangladesh at that moment did not have any answer for me.

I have known several Non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) teenagers, and to my great wonder, most of them possess good commonsense and soft feelings towards the people and society of ours. I even found some of them working for NGOs in poverty-elimination projects whenever they came to Bangladesh. They went to rural societies amid summer heat or monsoon rain. They talked and mixed with commoners and relished the hospitality of their homes with pitha and mohisher doi.

Though shocked by the poverty-level everywhere, they were awed by the sincerity and diligent attitude of our people. Some lamented by saying, 'Hey man, we have such promising workforce, how come they would always remain poor!'

Rabab, born and brought up in Texas, said, 'I haven't got the chance to see things for myself though I heard so much from my papa and mama over there; now I can realize one thing that it is WE, the so-called elites sitting in cities, who never want our people to improve. But boy, this country could've been a paradise!'

I later on asked the other NRBS whether they thought it right what Rabab thought right. And to my pleasure, the answer was affirmative from all.

Ever since my interaction with the NRBS, I have been often shaken by the thought of this contrast between the NRB kids and our patrician party-crazy kids, Riya for instance. Or even the school-going kids of that bus in Mohakhali. Such disparity in outlook toward parental land, why was that!

That evening in Dhanmondi, when I was looking at the eyes of the boys and was touched by the apparent helplessness glowing from their eyes, I sensed the importance of 'carrying a culture with oneself'. Our social world around us has been the prime arena

that has built, as well as rebuilt, our notions on an experimental basis, ever since we were born. We have internalized everything around us: the value system, the norms, the ethics, the laws, everything. It is because, we have been carrying a culture as well as the people belonging to that culture.

The NRBS too, have been doing the same thing. Well, they haven't been carrying the culture of their parental land. But they have been under the culture of the land they were born. The society they have been living, and the society they have been dreaming are identical to them. In their environment, they have never been traumatized by the conflict of reality versus myth. You cannot call them rootless. And since they have not been rootless, they can transfer their cultural attitudes to our society when they do occasional home-coming.

But here, in this wretched land of fifteen crore people, the conflict of attitude is monstrous. I have told the reasons earlier. See, when on the one hand you have a massive chunk of kids never tasting paalong shaak and alu bhawrta since their birth, never getting a piece of cloth on festivals, and on the other hand you have a small section of kids riding brand new cars with the liberty to choose between beef-stew and chicken-breast at lunch, you know that something has been seriously going wrong. Not somewhere, but everywhere! Therefore, our culture has been vandalized by wrongdoings.

Today, I ask you Pahela Baishakh, for how long should you stay merely as one-day romanticism for Bangalees? When will you make it your habit to make us realize the glory of carrying our own culture within us, and consequently relish the pride in being the children of this soil?

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