



## Oh Our Lord, Give us Patience, Now, Right Now!

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Patience is a chemical defect which is found on the losing side. Or so what every Bangladeshi thinks.

You are living in a fool's paradise if, standing in a queue, you think that sooner or later the line will move forward and you will be able to buy the ticket for the Ananta Jalil flick you have been patiently waiting to watch. The very fact that they have had to wait in a line is degrading enough for a Bangladeshi; sooner rather than later you will realise that 8/9 of your fellow countrymen have appeared from nowhere and have formed their own line, which, to your horror you will realise that, is longer than the queue that you are in. You will be left with a Shakespearean puzzle: to move to that line or to remain here. But to be or not to be is not really the question, as that line too won't move forward: newer queues will be formed by some more people and you will be left in the middle of a crowd or perhaps a scene that is funnier or even more tragic than the one that is going on in the theatre.

It's not that only ordinary Bangladeshis are afflicted with this disease of the mind, the country's politicians are also its innocent victims. The main opposition doesn't want to wait for five years for its turn to run the country. The party in power is making off with everything from the government exchequer

and the opposition leaders want to take a detour (read street agitation, *hartal* and *Oborodh*) to reach that much coveted destination (Gonobhaban). Is it not famous 'political scientist' Ricky Martin who has said, "When your soul is tired (because of police remand) and your heart is weak (people are tired of strikes), do you think of love (power/ getting a chance to steal people's money) as a one way street"?

Well, the street does run both ways, but we'll always drive against the traffic. We have to reach fast, before everyone, to get to work to gossip about every alternate person who's absent in the "meeting". Patience is definitely a virtue in Mecca, but not in Dhaka where to have to stand in a line is itself a proof that you are nobody, which no Bangladeshi thinks he is.

We Bangladeshis are a curious people. We show curiosity towards others because we care. Where else would someone ask a childless couple: *Why aren't you having a baby?* It may be considered a rude question in other societies. But here it is perfectly alright. We care.

Never mind the many possible reasons why the couple can't get pregnant. Never mind the helplessness and sadness they feel each time someone asks them this question. We have to know because we care. We don't care how it makes them feel. We care about why they can't have children. We love children in this country. We give them jobs. We put them to work and pay them little. If they have access to cash, God knows what they'll do. We will keep the cash. Working is good. It builds character.

## WE CARE

AMITAVA KAR

We are also a friendly lot. At a restaurant it's not uncommon to see three men dipping their *puris* in the same bowl of chutney. Where else in the world would you see such camaraderie! We are so friendly that when we see a colleague or someone we know we start massaging their arms and elbows. We want to make them feel comfortable. You wear a new jacket to work. Someone quietly starts feeling it with his hand, probably to see what material it is made of. Trust me, it's a compliment.

We treat strangers more formally. Have you been in an elevator where a group of men unknown to each other keeps looking at their cell phones? They are all anxiously waiting for that very important phone call which is never coming. We do not want to upset a stranger by saying hello. We are sensitive. When you say hello to a stranger, he or she will start wondering if they know you and where they know you from. Why put people under such unnecessary pressure?

If you are a foreigner, have a strategy ready to answer questions you never thought you would hear: *How much money did you make in your country? Is it true that girls roam the streets naked where you come from? Why did you come here?*

When such an intrusive question is lobbed at you, you might feel the urge to say something back. Resist the temptation. We mean no harm. We just have to know. So be playful. Try saying, "I am with the CIA. Why I came here is classified information."

If that does not work, resort to pure silliness and feign hearing loss: "What was the question again?" Repeat until they get the message.

Bangladeshis also love to ask: *Why aren't you married yet?* It's often men — married for several years and beaten by the burden of 'family life'—who ask such questions. But are they ready for possible answers? What if the poor guy has performance anxiety? What if he is gay? Do they ever consider such possibilities?

I think they are jealous of you being unmarried and having too much fun. They are also afraid that you will go and have an affair with their wives. That's it. I nailed it after a lot of thinking. And that's why when someone asks me why I don't have a wife yet, I say with a straight face, "Well, you know, my next door neighbour has one..."



SHARIER

CARTOON: SHARIER