

Following last year's highly successful BRAC Bank Women's Open, BRAC University Debating Club brings you the BRAC Bank Great Gender Debates – a tournament meant to create the necessary discussion on gender issues.

**BRAC BANK**

# THE GREAT GENDER DEBATES 2015

28th – 30th MAY



# #37 Days of Injustice

ISHRAT JAHAN

January to March 2015\* -  
 Rape cases mentioned in the media: 123  
 Cases filed: 72

A profound sense of uncertainty surrounds most cases of sexual harassment or rape. The distinct gap between the number of cases that occur and those reported is a tell-tale sign of a failing justice system and unresponsive law enforcement.

In the middle of the blame games, protests and brutality, the question that never has an answer is: *When will justice be found?*

It has been over a month since the Pahela Baishakh incident, and the response from the law enforcement authorities have been one and the same: denial and silence. When forced to acknowledge it, authorities regarded it to be “not a big deal.”

Protests have erupted at campuses and social media over the negligence and uncooperative attitude of the authorities. The most recent of these protests – organised by the Bangladesh Chhatra Union on May 10 – took a violent turn when the police tried to disperse the crowd of protesters outside the Dhaka Metropolitan Police headquarters. What became more alarming than the questionable brute force used against the protestors was the appalling manhandling of a female protestor by the police [caught on

camera].

The protesters, public and media have repeated time and again that if the police had shown the same manner of force and urgency in the face of the harassment incidents, perhaps the violent turn of events could have been avoided. However, the inactivity of law enforcement authorities regarding cases of sexual assault is an attitude rooted in a history of negligence and unimplemented laws.

Bangladesh classifies rape and many other sexual offences under the category of women and child repression. It's most recent milestone was the Supreme Court's ruling of killing after rape being a crime punishable by death or life term. Stalking of girls and women had previously been declared illegal by the High Court and it is considered a basic necessity under the constitution for all educational institutions and workplaces to establish a zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment.

*But are these laws being implemented efficiently?*

The culture of fear and stigma that haunts assault victims is more prevalent and practiced than the laws that were made to protect them. The authorities' reluctance to address the reality of the recent harassment incidents echo why cases go unreported and victims choose silence over justice. Laws are only as effective as those in the position of practicing them make them to be.

\*Ain-o-Salish Kendra documentation.

# SURVIVING (EXTENDED) FAMILY GET-TOGETHERS

DYUTY AURONEE

Family is a safe haven or so we know, but what about your mother's cousin's wife's sister? Extended family too can be loving and caring or even plain annoying and hence family gatherings can be a total showdown, I tell you.

I still remember those Friday afternoon *dawat* involving extended family that we used to have at my mother's paternal house in Old Dhaka. The alleys were narrow, the people loud and there was always too much food on the table. The unwritten rule was to enter the house and greet all the elders and then bow down to touch anyone's feet who had at least one strand of grey hair. I didn't particularly mind this because the elderly were always cute and warm but sometimes smelled of betel nuts and *attar*.

Then there was this one particular aunt, my mother's second cousin's wife, and her overdressed daughter. The first thing she noticed about me were the zits on my face and to my horror, her math game was on point. Done with her counting, she immediately grabbed my hand, sat me down and started prescribing me neem face packs twice a day. AUNTIE, NO, I had been pulling all-nighters and was out in the midday sun running from one coaching centre to the other and all I needed was a little sleep before my A Levels and not advice from a mother whose daughter would not even stir sugar into her tea by herself because hey, manicured nails.

There was also this uncle who was

concerned about how much weight I had put on. I was chubby, yes; still am, but he had no right to call me “hopeless” and my mother “careless” in a room full of 20 people. My mother and grandmother are great cooks and I like to eat and I had been binging on donuts because my exams were near. UNCLE, PLEASE. Did you ever look at your pot belly peeping through the fourth button of your shirt?

Even my parents were not spared, it seemed. My mother was often asked if the bangle she was wearing was of real gold and my father about his promotion or the lack of it. I wasn't old enough for this, thank God, but I saw one of my older male cousins being asked repeatedly when

he was getting married. If he were a girl, I suppose it would have been much worse. If you fail to give them a five year long future plan about your life in any case, they would simply conclude that you are not taking your life seriously. Period.

Weight or grade, they will always find something to pick on you. The newest addition is perhaps them enquiring about the boy/girl in your Facebook picture even though the caption is self explanatory and yes, innocent. Luckily, those days of *dawat* are over for me. That aunt has moved abroad and that uncle has been diagnosed with high cholesterol and avoids eating out. The get-togethers too don't happen quite as often and the only places I bump

into my extended family are weddings which are mostly concentrated towards the last quarter of the year.

Sometimes, I felt angry with my mother for not retorting when someone picked on me or my siblings. Well, she of course turned defensive about us but refrained from saying anything mean. As I grew up, I began to understand her standpoint, though I wouldn't ever follow this myself. If family loves us by default, shouldn't they accept our zits, and braces and decisions to eat pizza at midnight? Maybe some advice is reasonable but how are they of any value when all they do is upset and annoy you and not inspire you to change?



**Auntie,  
NO!**



**Uncle,  
PLEASE.**