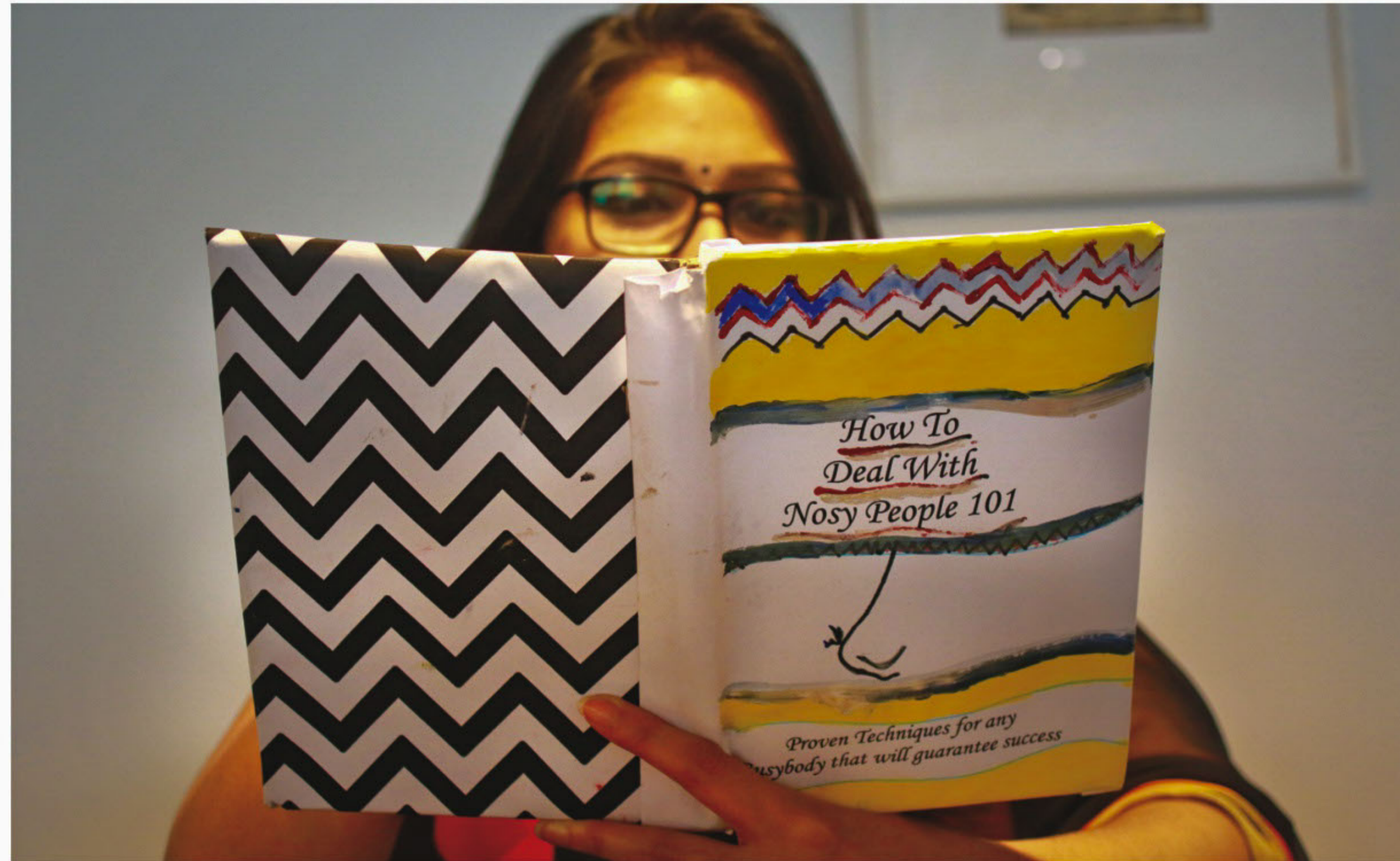


NOT YOUR BUSINESS

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



We, as a nation, are curious and inquisitive, and Bangladeshi weddings are the ultimate place where we prove it time and again. I like our colourful wedding ceremonies; they provide good food, you get to dress up nicely and take selfies, catch up with friends and people you have not seen in ages.

But then, there will also be acquaintances, who you barely know, who love to ask personal questions that make you squirm in your seat. Simply put these people are armed and dangerous. Armed with questions to invade your privacy, and dangerous because they pretend to be concerned about your wellbeing but are actually solely interested in getting the latest piece of gossip that they can whisper into each others' ears.

The other day I had to face such intrusive questions at a family wedding. From the front gate to the dinner table, I met a number of women, whose small talk included gems like this:

"So when are you planning for a baby?"

To be honest, I was not prepared for this. So I let my laughter lighten the awkward situation and gave a vague answer. But things started taking a serious turn when I had to face a barrage of such questions repetitively, till I reached the stage to greet the newlyweds. But even there I felt like I was suddenly thrown in the spotlight. For once, everyone made sure to look away from the bride, staring at me with curious, inquisitive eyes. I was embarrassed and annoyed. But at the same time I knew I was not alone.



All around the world, you'll find many victims like me, who attend wedding ceremonies, and face nosy people and their whole list of nosy questions. The questions could be seemingly innocuous, like a relative inquiring about your CGPA in the last semester, but then things get too serious, too soon.

"When are you getting married?" "Why are you not getting married?" "Do you have a job?" "Why do you not have a job?" "How much do you earn?" "When are you planning to have your first kid?" "Your child needs a sibling. When will you get the second one?" So on and so forth.

What saddens me even more is that the questions that we consider extremely personal may not always come from strangers. Sometimes, friends and families who seem genuinely interested to know

what is happening in your life are ready to jump into your grill. I want to believe that people do this with no intention of harming others. That they are not cruel, neither is their curiosity to know about my life.

But this unwanted curiosity can actually create a lot of stress, embarrassment, frustration and pain in the person who has to face such queries. What if they are having difficulty conceiving or are dealing with other health issues? What if they have decided that now is not the right time for them? What if they don't want to have a child at all? You don't know if they are going through a bad relationship. You don't know anything. The truth is that if anyone wants you to know something as personal as having or not having children, or

getting married soon or never, they will tell you. Don't let your curiosity ruin anyone's mood or time at a social gathering or anywhere else.

Sure, there are the witty, somewhat intimidating ones whose cutting remarks are sure to stop the inquisitors on the track. And then some people might not feel negatively about such questions.

But I can tell you, from my own experience and from that of several friends, such questions more likely than not does a lot to dampen spirits, making people feel somewhat insecure about their decisions.

So how do you deal with nosy people gracefully to make sure that they know that you don't want/like/need to answer to any of their remarkably 'original' questions?

Give an answer so mean and horrifying that they will regret asking the question, while silently declaring you as the most disrespectful person alive.

Or as one of my friends suggested, try to look sad and teary, giving a hint that you are emotionally disturbed and don't want to talk about the issue right now. They will be sympathetic while being left curious to know exactly what happened.

You can also squint a little bit and keep staring at them, indicating they are being "a little extra" intrusive and you don't appreciate it.

This will spare their potential future victims, who might be more sensitive about such issues than you. So you are actually doing a social service.

Or like I did, try to say something

inaudible with a smile, ignore them and look for food.

When I finally reached the food table, with many other strangers, relatives and guests, I finally felt a sense of relief. We were having light friendly chitchats while passing the glass of *borhani* to each other, or recommending the chutney that tasted so good.

Then suddenly, my ears became flushed, hot and itchy, and I almost choked on my biriyani when some random aunty from the other side of the table almost screamed at me, "So when are you people planning a baby?" (For the fifth time that day!)

This time, not only did I not want to answer but I could not have answered even if I wanted to. I had food in my mouth. I muttered something unintelligible, chewing the last piece of the meat on my plate.

She did not understand what I said. Nor did anyone at that table. They were disappointed, as was I.

My mind has been engaged with a passing thought since then.

Why do I have to discuss my family planning with a group of people I didn't even know well, at a wedding ceremony where the only thing I wanted to focus on was the biriyani?

If I don't grab you the minute you come through the door, commenting on how old you look, or why your child is rude to their elders, what gives you the right to ask such insanely personal questions?

Why not follow the mantra: Live and Let Live! ■



UPENDRAKISHORE RAY CHOWDHURY

12 May 1863 – 20 December 1915

Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, popularly known as Upendrakishore Ray is the author of some of the most well-loved children's books ever written in Bangla. Upendra's *Goopygayer*, *Baghabayen* and the tales on *Tona-tuni*, the birds laid a strong foundation of children's literature in Bangla and are devoured by millions of young readers even after 150 years of his birth. He was also a painter, violin player and composer, technologist and entrepreneur. He was the one who published the first children's magazine called *Sandash* in April 1913, which was exclusively for children and contained literary and scientific pieces and used to be immeasurably enhanced by good accompanying drawings done by him. Upendrakishore introduced the idea of half tone block making was also the pioneer of Bengali printing industry. Later, he started one of the best publishing houses in Kolkata named 'U. Ray & Sons'. After his death, the mantle of publishing went to his son Sukumar Ray, the famous writer took charge of the publishing house after his death. After Sukumar Ray's death the mantle of publishing went to Upendrakishore's grandson Satyajit Ray, the renowned filmmaker.

JUST ANOTHER FAMILY

Living in a joint family, with members from many generations, under one roof brings more of everything- more love, more care and sometimes more boundaries and expectations. For me living in an extended family consisting of my family, my uncle's family, my grandmother, is sometimes advantageous. In our family my grandmother works as a big support system and has a strong influence in many facets of my life. But every now and then there is always expectation that you should do certain things and you must refrain from certain things- and travelling alone is one of them. Both my parents and my uncle-aunts are highly educated, but they are way too protective as they think I am incapable of taking decisions. I have a job that requires a lot of travelling which has become a matter of concern for them. They say they support my decision to travel, but they also keep mentioning how anxious they are. This time when I had an opportunity of travelling abroad for a month, my father did not agree at all. I had a talk with my grandmother who is in her 70s but has always supported us in pursuing our dreams. She brought this conversation over dinner, and told my father why it is wrong for them to make me feel negative about my choices. "Do not bust boundaries and let her learn the boundaries through trial and error. We should encourage her to explore what the world has to offer" she said. My father was not fully convinced with her, but he let me go anyway and it was one of the best trips that I had so far.

Fahima Huda
Banani, Dhaka



PHOTO: COURTESY

AN UNUSUAL SIGHT

This Mother's day, my whole family and I went to dinner at a restaurant in Gulshan. I suddenly noticed a young couple sitting near us, who brought their maid, aged 10-12, with them for dinner. It is a common sight for us to see family having meals in city's well-known eateries, while their maids stand far away from them, taking care of the children. While in most cases we don't give our staff a seat at the table, these kind souls were actually treating their maid with respect and asking the young girl what kind of food she would like to have for herself. What surprised me most was they planned this dinner exclusively for her, and all they were doing the entire time was trying to get to know her better, asking about her likes and dislikes and making her laugh. They were teaching her how to gently slice her food with a knife, and asking if she liked the food or not. They were treating her like a part of their family and I was really impressed with their level of kindness.

Nahela Bahar
Lalmatia, Dhaka