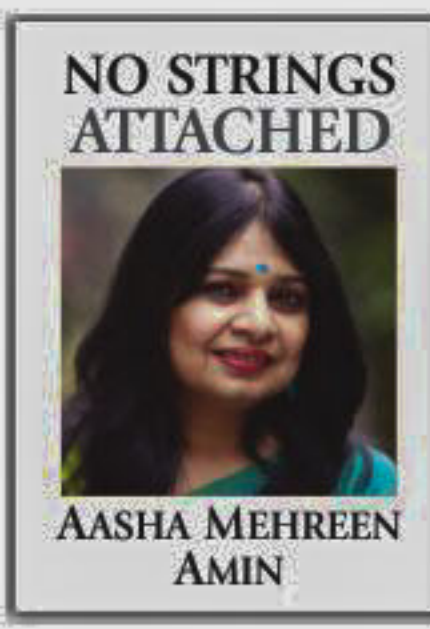


Sandwiched between militancy and consumerism



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

DESPITE all the ramifications of progressiveness that civilisation has experienced with, the preoccupation with the female members of the population has never been on the wane. Unfortunately this fixation is not about the welfare of women or their emancipation. It is about confining them into little boxes of male comfort. We can claim all we like that we have come a long way. Really? A long way to where? Patriarchy seems to be conspiring with religious fanaticism and consumerist greed creating a world where the woman is defined solely by a male perspective.

If you are a South Asian female you are in the unique position of experiencing sexism from many quarters. Male dominance is enmeshed in tradition, culture and religion. Tribalism, which has always been the breeding ground of chauvinism, is unchallenged in subjective interpretations of religion. When it comes to preaching Islam, clerics show unwarranted alacrity to declare the dos and don'ts of females in society – to denigrate them as lesser, impure beings who must be kept under control and supervision by the male members of society. It is as if the whole legitimacy of religion, even the entire balance of nature, depends on how well the women are kept 'in their place'. Hence the overemphasis on how much they must cover and how far they may step out of their 'zenana'. How much of these restrictions can be attributed to the scriptures is of course questionable, though they can be traced back to the ancient patriarchal systems of most cultures. In fact just by looking at how our Prophet (PBUH) treated his wives gives a clear idea about the respect given to women by Islam which was quite novel at a time when female infanticide and selling of female slaves were part of the culture. The Prophet (PBUH) broke all conventions and stereotypes when he married a financially independent woman, a businesswoman 15 years his senior, and treated her with respect and admiration all throughout their married life. But all this is forgotten by those who want to use religion to subjugate women. Thus tribalism and religion often become interchangeable. And with no one to challenge

these dictates of self-proclaimed religious authorities, male dominance and female repression are married and may well be on their way to living happily ever after. So when the patriarch of the family 'forbids' his wife, daughters and daughters-in-law to drive or work or do anything without his permission, he can easily get away with his ludicrous bully tactics by invoking religion, although what he is actually doing is exploiting his position of privilege as a male.

So is it only Muslim sensibilities that reinforce gender stereotypes in South Asian society? Even a cursory viewing of most Indian drama series, which many Bangladeshis watch with religious fervour, shows the gross gender stereotyping of women. The *bahus* who never take off their

research as being depicted as characters in these drama serials.

The same goes for Bollywood but of course with greater focus on women's sexuality – the ultimate symbol of modern consumerism. The woman as a product (a phenomenon taken from the West, though more of that later) is as sexy as the word itself. The demand for objectified females has driven filmmakers to do away with the thin line between the attractive and the sleazy. Thus even the pure and innocent heroine may do an item number in threadbare clothes – as is fantasised by her lover boy and the many males in the audience. The fate of heroines in Bangladeshi mainstream cinema is the same or worse than their Bollywood counterparts.

place, as ornamental creatures craving for male attention. If this is what the so-called modern, enlightened, liberated world has become fixated on why blame only demented religious extremists bent on taking the world to the Dark Ages where women are just sex slaves available for sale to the highest bidder?

And then you have pornography, the toxic byproduct of consumerism that transcends geographical and ideological barriers. So you have an indoctrinated terrorist of a death cult in a war-torn Middle Eastern town and an impressionable pre-pubescent boy in some American backwater watching the same degradation of women through the internet. They may be distant from each other by thousands of miles but a part of



designer jewellery or makeup – not even when they sleep, are relegated to household chores and family intrigue – as much as their tiny brains will allow. If there is any spark of intelligence in the woman she is usually a vamp – conniving, deceitful and treacherous. The good woman, generally a naïve little goody-two-shoes who lives in La La land, is constantly misunderstood and can only be saved by the magnanimity of the male protagonists. Funnily, some of these soaps are written by women, which goes to show that when it comes to getting good ratings, a little compromise on feminist ideals is an acceptable sacrifice. Interestingly, you don't see those Indian women who have become prominent leaders in journalism or the corporate world or scientific

The West is just as completely immersed in consumerism where the woman especially her sexuality is the most saleable product. It makes female pop artists believe that half their talent lies in how explicitly they can exhibit their bodies through crude music videos. It celebrates lyrics that vulgarly highlight the female anatomy. There is nothing liberating about the fact that fashion almost always creates images of women that objectify them even if women themselves completely endorse it. That is how much we have been brainwashed – to showcase ourselves primarily as objects of desire. Hence the shorter the skirt, the deeper the cleavage, the skinnier the jeans to the point of stopping blood circulation, the easier it is to keep women (and girls) in their

their perception of woman is defined by the pornographic images that depict women as objects to be used and abused. The notion of the good woman vs. the fallen one becomes defined by these distorted images. Misogyny, as displayed by many terrorists and sociopaths, could very well be reinforced by these perversions.

Thus religious distortions and the excesses of consumerism are partners in the crime of oppressing women through misinterpretations of religion or creating delusions of liberation through gross objectification. With such forces working against her, can the woman of the 21st century ever find true freedom?

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Opinion, *The Daily Star*.

What is happening in Turkey?

AHMED GÜRBÜZ

IN the evening of July 15, an unauthorised military mobilisation, out of the chain of command, started in various cities of Turkey, particularly in Ankara and Istanbul. Later on, it was understood that this military mobilisation was a coup attempt. It was launched and conducted by a clique of soldiers from different ranks within the Turkish Armed Forces linked to Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) to overthrow the democratically elected Government of Turkey.

The coup plotters fired at their own people, stabbed their commanders in the back and bombed the Office of the Presidency and Police Headquarters.

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which is the main representative of the national will, came under attack for the first time in Turkey's democratic history. The perpetrators also tried to broadcast their message by taking over studios of the state television (TRT) and raiding private media outlets.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım called people to take the streets, squares and airports to defend the democracy, democratic politics, democratic institutions and the Constitution. Turkish people responded to that call by flooding onto the streets and standing against the tanks of the gang of coup plotters. This unique and historic solidarity have foiled the coup

attempt. Unfortunately, at least 246 people, including members of the security forces and civilians were martyred in Istanbul and Ankara, and more than 1,500 others were wounded while resisting the coup attempt.

Following the failed coup attempt, all the political parties in the Turkish Parliament displayed solidarity with the elected Government, underlined the indispensability of democratic institutions, supported the national will by issuing a joint declaration during the extraordinary meeting. It is clearly shown that democracy will prevail.

This coup attempt carried out by a faction of plotters in the military, linked to the FETÖ, led by the US based cleric Fethullah Gülen. On July 21, 2016, the Turkish Government declared

a three-month valid state of emergency in the whole country to duly investigate and prosecute those suspected to be part of FETÖ, which has dangerous undercover networks not only in the army but also in several state organs. There should be no doubt that the process will be conducted as usual in full respect to fundamental rights and freedoms and the rule of law. The lives of ordinary people will not be affected during the state emergency period.

Bangladesh is one of the nations that have shown solidarity with the people of Turkey after the coup attempt targeted Turkey's democracy. The Turkish President received several phone calls and messages from his counterparts and head of governments around the world, including the

Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In her written message addressed to President Erdoğan, Prime Minister Hasina condemned the coup attempt, expressed sincere condolences for the people who lost their lives, supported the democratically elected Government and rule of law and extended congratulations to the leadership of the Republic of Turkey for successful intervention on the situation.

We would like to extend our thanks to Bangladeshi brothers and sisters who showed their solidarity and support at the highest level with a message of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The writer is Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. of Turkish Embassy. The article is exclusive to *The Daily Star*.



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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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