

REVEALED!!!

THE BANGLADESHI YOUTH IN 2016

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One of the problems with writing in English is using words whose Bangla substitutes are simply superior. 'Youth' is such an awkward thing to say, and it'd be so much better if we used 'jubok' instead. A 'jubok' is the sort of dynamic go-getter years of activation programmes and empowerment seminars promised us we could become; a 'youth' is in trouble with the police for chucking rotten eggs out of a speeding vehicle. I'd love to use 'jubok' all the way to end of this article but I'm writing for 'The Definitive Youth Magazine' on the eve of International Youth Day so my hands are tied.

So let's talk about youths – that ungainly demographic that can straddle everyone aged 14 to 24. What to do they like? What do they do? Why do they do it, and can we stop them before it's too late? Burning questions that are far too big for any ordinary man to answer. Watch me attempt and fail.

Wherever you are the first thing you have to understand about youths is Facebook. Facebook is *really* important. Forget the old, tired jokes about being stalked by people you broke up with ten years ago or having hundreds of friends you'll never meet in your life; 2008's material can stay in 2008. In fact, modern Facebook is barely about the people. It's about their ideas. We live in the age of the meme.

The concept of the meme was first articulated by Richard Dawkins in 1976. A meme is an idea that spreads between people in a culture, mutating and gaining strength along the way – an interesting concept the internet decided was better applied to describe images of rare frogs and the ironic mourning of a dead gorilla. The Global Brotherhood of Memery's Bangladesh chapter employs many youths who spend their time on Facebook aggressively sharing and manufacturing these memes. Some are of an international standard; most are horrid and should be set on fire.

In fact precious few are memes at all. In these parts any notionally funny image with text slapped atop can be called a meme and get gotten away with. As disrespectful as this is to Mr. Dawkins' work, it's better than the alternative term popular among the local youth: 'trolls'. Bangla 'troll' pages are the dark legacy of 2011's 'Thikasse bhaaaaaa', whose admins can relate to Einstein's post-Nagasaki mood. Youths also use other social media, though I have no idea why. Time is spent on WhatsApp and some of the older folk even turn to Tinder. While these are acceptable enough media if you for some reason wish to talk to friends or strangers who find you attractive, they are sub-optimal for memery. No more needs to be said on the subject.

Image-sharing media such as Instagram and Snapchat are fine in theory, but in practice they are eroding the foundations of civilisation. Where once youths had simple, straightforward desires such as not dying of dysentery, they now set their sights on attaining the nebulous state of being termed 'on fleek'. Name me one great figure in history who ever cared about achieving their 'squad goals'; you can't, because that's not how newspapers work. At most you can shout something at the page, alarming your loved ones uselessly. I am

at my home and can't hear you.

Speaking of squad goals, many a young person has historically liked to spend their time engaged in gang warfare. The problem is that until recently there was no legal way of doing this. In the interests of giving law enforcement a break, a virtual substitute has appeared in the form of Clash of Clans, which combines the tense, cut-throat thrills of the Cosa Nostra with the gentle satisfaction of empire-building that made the British such a sophisticated people. In many ways CoC acts as a supplement if not an outright proxy for personal interaction. I have witnessed multiple phone conversations between serious CoC-ers planning in minute detail their coordinated assault on foreign clans. The stakes are high and not limited to in-game progress: many a young man has been betrayed by his lady love allying herself with a man who can offer her a bigger clan.

Consider their devotion to this heady mix of personal drama, intricate realpolitik and brutal conquest and you can easily guess what the Bangladeshi youths' favourite TV series is.

Yes, there's no greater show on Earth than the Machiavellian medieval murderama called Game of Thrones. Come April it dominates discourse, monopolises memes and leaves Trump as a conversation topic simply nowhere. It gets to the point where many a youth actually refuses to watch it out of protest, to show they don't follow the herd. These are the people who post "Got amar dakha MOST faltu show!!" on TV Fanatics even though it's August already: a last-ditch attempt at retaining their individuality after the season ends.

There's

an enduring, terribly sexist idea that young ladies only watch Hindi soap operas. While I'm happy to report that this notion is dying out, it's unfortunately not at the hands of some sweeping social epiphany. No, all that has happened is that Korea has supplanted India. The funny thing about Korean dramas is that, unlike Hindi, hardly any of the Bangladeshi audience understand the language. Whoever invented the subtitle has much to answer for. Many people laugh off their interest in these Korean shows with casually racist observations like "Shobgulare dekhite toh eki lage amar!" but this fools no one. We know you like it. We *know*.

A certain kind of adult talks a lot about the Indianisation of our generation. Clearly they have never encountered an extremely Bangladeshi teenage girl whose Facebook profile looks like a shrine to Korean pop culture – K-Pop boy bands for cover photos and all. *This* is what the late night talk shows should be worrying about, leave 'pakhi' dresses alone.

And it's not just girls who wish they'd been born Korean. League of Legends has spread its cancerous roots into every corner of the globe and even Amar Shonar Bangla has not been spared. The victims of this soul-crushing eSport can be found huddled together in various bedrooms, fields and university canteens – not talking about the cars, phones or women as is



natural for young men. No, what fascinates them is Kha'zix's viability in 2016, Ahri's cup size, and the latest play by Faker. "Ammu ami boro hoye Faker hobo" they might say if they weren't already adults who should know better.

Faker-worship isn't *that* weird if you see it as sports fans wanting to emulate their idols. How many little boys grew up wanting to be

Messi? More than enough to frighten any government that cares about future tax revenues. In fact, Messi's tax avoidance might make him the quintessential Bangladeshi hero, though many discerning football fans, particularly of



the female persuasion, do find much to admire in CR7. It warms the heart to think that even a neck like his can find love in this cold, cruel world.

It is necessary at this stage to talk about cricket, but this is a subject I have no interest in so let's just move along.

While all work and no play makes Joshim a dull boy, most youths do eventually seek a place in the informal economy. Private tuition is an option fit for all the age groups under 'youth'. You can make big bucks teaching someone who doesn't know better, especially if you can get yourself into a more official role at a bona fide coaching centre. The real benefit of tuition is that *you only need to know one thing more than your student*. This makes it more attractive than, say, writing articles for a national newspaper, which is a punishing discipline that demands an almost Aristotelian breadth of knowledge.

Mind you, once you reach the outer reaches of youthhood you will be qualified to enter the world of digital marketing where not knowing anything at all is not frowned upon.

Many digital marketers rely on youth interns. In fact, if you are within SHOUT's target demographic, chances are you are possibly considering an internship right now. Internships are all well and good – if you're about to complete a degree or are at least older than 20 years of age. If you insist on interning somewhere it's important to ensure that you don't work for a self-important hack who will bully you into believing it is your privilege to spend the springtime of your life breaking your back for them in projects that they will ultimately take sole credit for. Since younger folk are unlikely to have the life experience to suss such con artists out it's better to give it a miss and enjoy life. Play Pokémon or something.

Which leads us neatly to possibly the freshest youth fad. Pokémon GO, dear reader, is a magical experience where youths and indeed adults wander about the streets with their phones in their hands, attempting to capture and tame digital monsters that pop up on their screens, inspired by the televised antics of a permanently pubescent boy and his life partner, a yellow electric rodent. Forget those Facebook quizzes and psychology websites, your reaction to this paragraph is the true measure of your personality type.

So there you have it. The Bangladeshi youth in 2016. Many an adult bemoans the state this generation is in but honestly the fears are greatly exaggerated: the juboks are alright. Don't try to change a thing, you'll ruin the flavour.

