



## THOUGHT CRAFT

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# The angels in the house

It is morning in Dhaka, a beautiful sunny day, as always. I enjoy the view from my window while I wait for my tea.

My tea is perfect, made just as I like it. After my second cup, I make my way to the kitchen. Zaheda is there in the sunlit verandah surrounded by an array of fresh vegetables on trays. She looks up and smiles as she asks if I need anything.

I realise that I have been greeted by the same smile and question every day for the last twenty years. Zaheda's hair is tinged with grey now, and her face has a few lines but her smile and cheerful demeanour are the same. Her husband abandoned her, and her daughter is a disappointment, but I hear her humming to herself while she works.

Zaheda is a hoarder. She collects old

bags, bottles and tins. She wears patched clothes, claiming they are soft and comfortable, and puts away the good ones I give her to wear. She is thrifty on my behalf too, and keeps a strict count of everything in the kitchen, down to the last mouldy potato and shrivelled okra.

After my visit to the kitchen, I return to my room and find that my bed has been made, and the newspapers laid out for me to read, along with my spectacles. Rabeya has tidied everything. She is plumper than when she first arrived many years ago, and sadder, after a divorce and other problems, but still full of life, energy and kindness. Her young son is the centre of her life.

In her spare time, Rabeya likes watching Sultan Suleiman, or the Bangla news on TV,

while she works on her nakshikathas. She always updates me on news of the latest launch capsizes, or the newest tremors. I depend on Rabeya to bring me my many cups of tea, charge my laptop, find my spectacles, and even make calls to technicians on my behalf.

There are thousands of others like my helpers, working in homes all over the country. Many of them have been abandoned by their husbands, or are widows. They manage to see their children only a few times a year when they go to their villages; they seldom get to meet their families without being asked for money. They fall ill, but recover quietly, without complaint or fuss.

Almost all of them have lost infants or older children to disease, accident or other

misfortunes, and yet one seldom hears them complain. They are resigned to the fact that their lives will be hard, so their grieving is silent. They have little time to indulge in sadness or depression, because in their world there are no cures except work and wages. In spite of it all, they are cheerful, calm and positive.

Women like these, who provide the help we need in our day to day lives, who do our laundry and our cleaning, cook our delicious meals, serve our morning tea and cater continually to our needs, are the pillars of our world. These brave, strong women in all our homes are not just helpers; they are the angels of the household. I, for one, feel that I am fortunate to have them.

By Nasrin Sobhan

## MUSINGS

# Melodrama overdose

Perhaps there is not a single household left today in Bangladesh where at least one female member is not engrossed with sappy TV serials and their melodrama. Be it Hindi or their more popular West Bengal variations, if the script contains the chronicles of a troubled marriage, the ladies are in on it to sympathise with all their hearts. Noble women!

You may have denied your addiction, stridently, in front of your husbands until now but at the back of your mind you know how immoral you are being!

The addiction to serials began 20 years ago with the advent of cable TV.

Bangladeshi women particularly found the serials alluring because of their few yet relatable aspects, especially with their own lives. Typical mother-in-law and daughter-in-law strained relationships are shown with cynical twists in the plot. From these serials it can be derived that politics in the home arena are no less enjoyable, and vicious, than fight scenes on the war fronts.

Most mothers-in-law are shown as shady characters while the daughters are almost indistinguishable saints. Mid-way through most of the Hindi serials, the husband of the main character or the 'bahu' disappears, only to return later, mysteriously, with an outlandish explanation such as abduction, amnesia, or a terrible affair gone wrong.

Amazingly, the hired helps around the house are no less attached to these sentimental serials, perhaps even more than their respective employers. It's common knowledge that in most cases before joining a residence for work, they demand few things besides salary and upkeep and YES! TV time!

They demand a disturbance free time, everyday, to watch their favourite serials. Any change on that note is unacceptable; so you either let them watch their TV serials or you work on your own.



What is more interesting is that the domestic help, who usually come from the remotest part of the country, understand Hindi spectacularly well. If Hindi could reach the depth of our hearts so easily just because of the serials, then it is probably time to popularise our own Bangladeshi serials with the exaggerated storylines, 'add-on' ear-splitting sound effects and bizarre costume jewellery.

Reading this material one might come to the conclusion that I might be an anti-Hindi-serial type of person. The truth would be quite the contrary; I like the serials and their typical showdowns and I particularly love seeing all the good looking women

and men, wearing their gorgeous saris and sherwanis, even in their beds and taking naps with their entire make-up on.

Poor or rich, uneducated or educated, it binds us all women-folk together and it does so with the best of intention. I do not think I have the courage to ask my mother to change the channel while she watches her favourite serial on Zee Bangla. She might decide to disown me!

The men might feel a little left out because I have not mentioned them yet. But I always save the best for the last. No matter how much, 'the gentlemen' may try to deny watching these serials, most of them usually know the entire story by heart. How are the

two possible at the same time? That denial's veracity is anybody's guess.

So there is no shame in accepting the fact that these serials are simply addictive. Plus, the age old proverb "if you cannot beat them, join them" helps to clarify the mass boarding of the serial fans train. So if 'lady love' is watching, and daughters are watching, and the remote control entirely under their management, you are pretty much left with no choice but to watch it as well.

So join in boldly and group along with your sons. Here's to happy TV hours!

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury

Photo: Collected