

pa-tri-arch-y
noun
• A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

DO YOU RECOGNISE THE PATRIARCHY?

NAZIBA BASHER

mother came to you and said, "You're a boy! Boys don't cry!" A few years later, your first girlfriend cheated on you and left. It broke your heart and the tears fell. Your friends made fun of you, "Are you even a man?" they asked. When you left for college, you hugged your father. It felt like the last time. You tried to swallow it down, but your eyes watered anyway. "What is wrong with you? Don't cry at college! You're a man!" said the person you were embracing. You remembered these words, all of them. You decided to close yourself off completely, grew like a rock. Now, you can't cry. But to feel the relief, you raise your hand – on men, on women, on children. Hitting makes you feel more like a man than crying ever did. Who cares if someone's hurt? If they're a man, they won't cry about it. **This is patriarchy.**

A man smokes freely on the road, you can't because you're afraid someone will call you a whore. **This is patriarchy.**

Women and men have separate sporting events, because the women 'can't match up to the men'. **This is patriarchy.**

You are chosen for a film, not because your acting is polished, but because you have a nice body and are easier to objectify. **This is patriarchy.**

Your brother never cleaned his room. You cleaned yours, his, and then everyone else's. He's the son. He's the prince. **This is patriarchy.**

Your salary being calculated according to your gender.

You always wanted to be a working woman. At the age of 18, you got yourself a job you love. Then you got another. Then you got another. Being a workaholic, that's all you kept yourself busy with. After 6 years of tireless devotion, things began to kick-off. You began to reach new heights. People began recognising you for your efforts. But at the same time, people also began talking, asking questions. Colleagues, relatives, friends, family, men, women – "Why isn't she getting married yet?" they asked, "Shouldn't she settle down? What's the point of working so hard if it doesn't acquire her a husband?" **This is patriarchy.**

You love children. Always have. Since you were 9-years-old, you've been the neighbourhood babysitter. Taking care of others' children always made you want to have your own. So when you reached a certain age, after realising that a 9-5 job just wasn't your thing, you wanted to get married to that man who's been your partner the last few years. You wanted to have your children with him, nurture them, and raise them into wonderful human beings with dreams and ambitions. Some women snarled at you, called you and your ambitions 'weak'. "Do men want such things? How will we ever be empowered with children to cook and clean after?" they smirked, thinking that having a man's ambition is what will help women move forward. **This is patriarchy.**

When you were 8, you had hurt yourself and you fell to the ground crying. Your

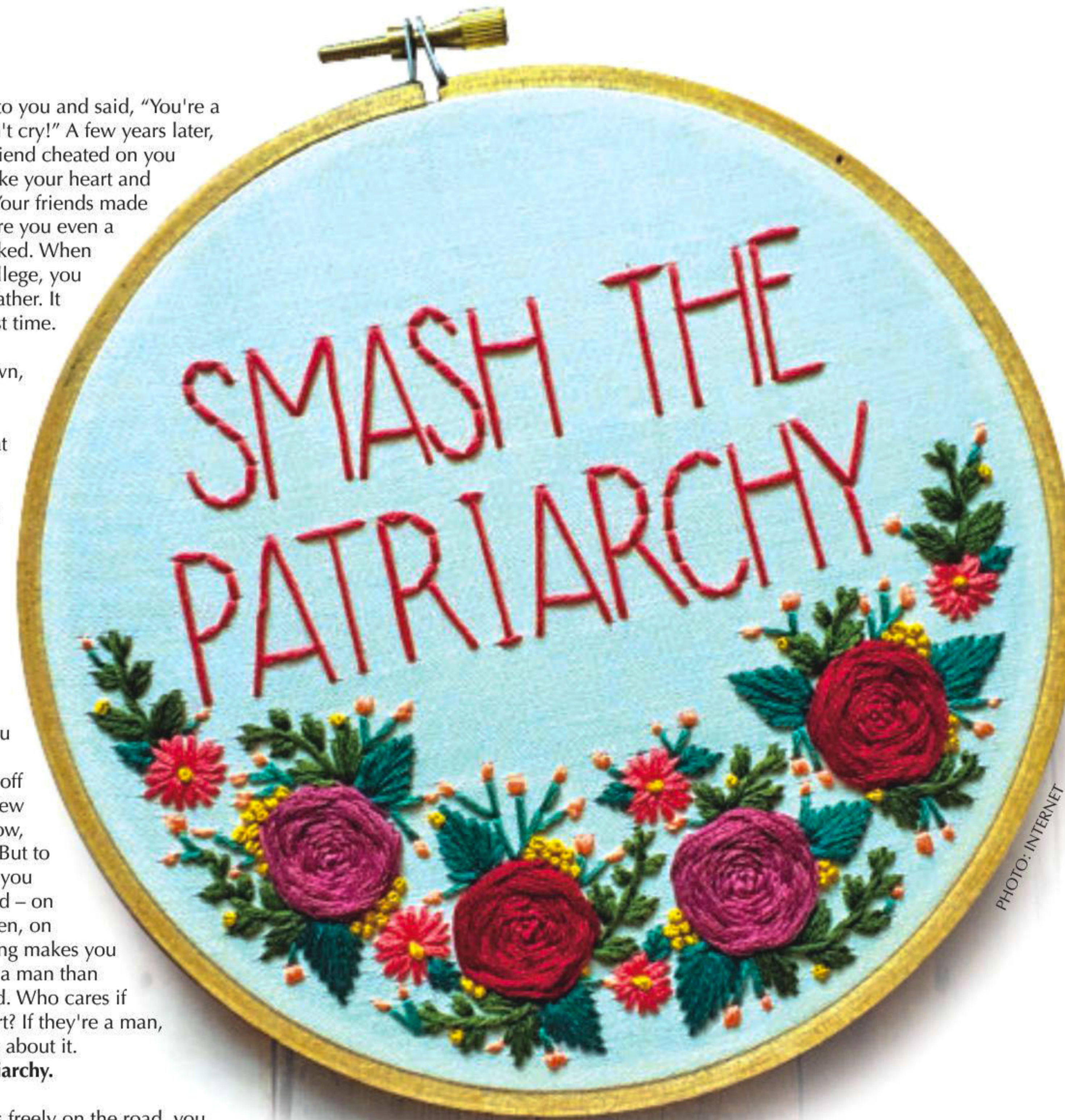


PHOTO: INTERNET

PERSPECTIVE

MUSINGS

ZYMA ISLAM

It was definitely after office hours when a phone call came and made me panic. The number on my screen was unknown but it was pretty easy to guess where the call came from. The law enforcement bodies have a digit sequence that most journalists in the city are trained to recognise.

So, of course, I knew who was calling and – from where. I debated for a moment exactly how useful this man is as a source. A hundred calculations teemed in my head but the phone was going to fall silent at any moment. I gave up and swiped my screen.

What followed afterwards can, at best, be called a patronising conversation. Or you could call it my normal. He giggled throughout. He accused me of forgetting about him. I stayed quiet and took it. Told him to get me a scoop on something I was working on. He told me to visit. For sure, I said, but I do have a colleague I want you to meet so I'll bring him too.

"Him" – a male colleague – because there is no way I'm walking into that meeting alone.

I hated him for making me feel vulnerable; forcing me to take shelter behind a man.

The call ended. I was relieved – it could've been worse. It has been worse. These men, in positions of power, with guns in their belts, have no qualms about calling after 11pm to "get to know me".

Or snap photos on the sly. Or ask me to smile for the camera if I show that I've noticed.

"What's a beautiful woman like you doing unmarried? Don't you want sons?" asked one. I laughed and showed him a picture of my cats. My marital status is the most frequently dissected topic of conversation I have with these men.

"What's this woman doing here?" another shouted. We were in the middle of a police raid in a counterfeit goods factory.

I looked him squarely in the eye. "Journalist," I said, the only journalist to be asked why she's there.

The word 'woman' stung and brought with it a heavy list of hidden meanings. It meant that I, being a walking, talking target for sexual predators, am an added source of nuisance for the men around me who are "responsible" for my protection. It meant that my presence was a ticking bomb and the cops around have one more thing to take care of when maintaining law and order. I could be the best reporter of the lot and still make people ask this question – is it worth the trouble having her here?

The word made me not feel welcome and is probably the reason why there are so few female reporters covering



ILLUSTRATION: E. R. RONNY

breaking news.

A 2015 study published in the renowned Humanities and Social Sciences journal interviewed a hundred female journalists from Bangladesh and found only one crime reporter in the entire sample set. Seventy-one of them faced sexual harassment and gender discrimination out on the field. There's no denying it – it's a good, old-fashioned men's club.

Anyway, I swallowed my pride, pointed to his boss and said I got called in by the big guy.

Invited by men, hired by men, protected by men. My fierce feminist self chafes that I have to get validation from men to do the job I love.

The list of things I have experienced goes on – from constantly having to justify my presence to the one occasion when a senior journalist placed his cold, clammy hand at the bottom of my spine.

To many of my colleagues and sources, before I am a journalist, I am a sexual being. So, I constantly police my clothes – sleeves, necklines that carefully calculate how many millimeters of skin can be shown, broad scarves

that drape over me like a shroud, for I've truly killed who I am to be out with them.

Honestly, though, why just blame Bangladeshi men? Internationally in pop culture and TV plotlines women journalists are always shown to be having affairs with their sources. So why won't perpetrators assume all female reporters trade tricks for tips? Think Zoe Barnes (Kate Mara) in *House of Cards*, Amy Schumer in *Trainwreck*, Andy (Anne Hathaway) in *The Devil Wears Prada* and more infamously, Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson) in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. My taller-than-average height and active gym membership makes me an easy victim of the stereotype.

It took years of being a journalist for me to write this. Female journalists protesting gender discrimination – however few they may be – are seen as whiny, inconvenient. Perpetrators use it as yet another reason why not to allow women in. So the voices stay quiet, unwilling to trade their professions for their dignity. Without a shift in paradigm, dissent will always be limited to the lone article written once in a while. ■

ABOUT TOWN

WSIF Presents
WORKSHOP ON "COMBATING DEPRESSION IN WOMEN: LET'S TALK"
ORGANISER: AMAL
Venue: Bishwo Shahitto Kendro BSK, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue
Date: March 4, 2017
Time: 3- 5.30 pm

WORKSHOP WITH THE WORKING WOMEN TITLED 'TUMI SOROBOJOYA'
Registration fee: Tk. 100.
Organiser: Moner Bondhu
Venue: Zero Degree Communication, 27/3 (1st Floor), Central Road
Date: March 4, 2017
Time: 3- 6 pm

SIDDHARTA TALUKDER PAINTING EXHIBITION (SELF-REVELATION)
Organiser: Alliance Française De Dhaka
Venue: Alliance Française De Dhaka - la galerie
Date: March 10-18, 2017