

# A visit to the men's salon

Entering a salon on the second floor of the BFC building on Dhanmondi Road #28 was more of an impulsive act, spurred on by friends and sparked by the migraine of a hot day in April. I had called a friend from university, knowing that she too got her hair cut from a men's salon and she lived in Dhanmondi and so, it would be nearby. In fact, it was.

Sipping on my cold mulberry smoothie, I walked from Road #27 to the salon. A rickshaw ride would have been easier in the heat, but the traffic was worse than the heat. The coolness of the AC hit me first. This was not some roadside salon, and this being my first time in a men's salon, I was nervous about the expense, having heard stories from friends who had gotten their hair cut for about Tk 600 at times, while the regular rate was about Tk 80 to Tk 100.

Moreover, I was a girl, with long hair, what if they decided to charge me more? As these thoughts ran in my mind, I decided on an image as reference and then asked how much it would cost. To my relief and shock, it would cost only Tk 150. My least expensive haircut since I had turned 14 cost me Tk 500, even for a little trim on straight hair!

Gleefully I took in the strong smell of hair products and shaving cream, the buzzing noise from the trimmer that interjected the commentary of a cricket game was all I could hear and I could tell the hairstylists and cashiers knew I was a novice and so they let my friends sit on either side, something quite different from the busy and bustling parlours where there was never enough space to wait or stand by someone even as they got their nose pierced or nervously had their hair cut or had to tolerate the pain of plucking one's eyebrows.

My hairstylist for the day patiently looked at the photos I showed him, and listened to me as I explained that I was not afraid of short hair, so he should in fact cut it quite short, this bit I had been advised by my friend to mention as otherwise they cut women's hair a little differently than men's.

Then he began, first by properly fitting a black wrap/robe around my neck which covered me up to my ankles and tucked in a paper towel all around my neck. It looked like one of the starched collars that priests wear.

He cut my hair bit by bit, so that my friends could document the transition through pictures, and already I could see myself changing. I relaxed for a bit as the stylist cut away first on the right, then left and then on the top and back, to make sure the length was the same all around.

In the mirrors, I could see two other men, one getting a massage after his hair had been cut and face shaved and another person directing the length up to which his hair was to be

trimmed. I took in all of this along with the bright white lights which lent a blue hue to the interior, in stark difference to the lighting in the parlours which was warm and slightly muted.

As my stylist finished cutting, he asked a young boy to get the powdering boxes and before I knew it, he used a coarse wide brush with white bristles to remove the small bits of hair, which had fallen all over my face and tickled my nose, he added the fragrant talcum powder in the mix and in a matter of minutes my hair cut was complete.

The last touches were left — setting my hair and a large part of that seemed to be tousling it, and as he massaged my scalp and pulled at my hair, I could feel myself becoming drowsy!

After paying and thanking them for the haircut I noticed two things, that I had 'phantom hair' while at the same time, I could feel the gentle evening breeze on my shoulders and the back of the neck like I never had before, at least that I remember of.

This was the first time I had gotten my hair cut in a men's salon after I had grown up and had been taught that women go to parlours and men go to salons. As a child I had always gone to the barber shop near the departmental store at the end of the 'goli' (street) where our house was and my mother would accompany me and she would buy me a Mimi Chocolate or some Potato Crackers to help me get over the of having had to cut my hair.

When I was a little older, and I had to keep my hair longer to keep in line with 'becoming a woman' ideology, my hair was cut at home, all lacklustre, a pair of sharp scissors and fine comb and my mother's own skills, until eventually I was allowed to go to the parlour when I was deemed old enough.

I fondly laugh at these memories now, as I go back to the Men's Salon, in love with the simple yet tricky haircuts and the massage that follows for free.

**By Ayesha Rahman Chowdhury**

**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed/Hair Bar**

