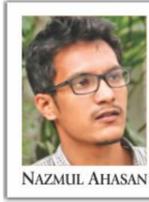


# Subodh never runs away



NAZMUL AHASAN

I open Facebook on my phone. I then tap on "What's on your mind?" and type a post lambasting—ahem—those you cannot lambast.

No, I do not post the status. Instead, I keep my finger pressed on the backspace button and erase every word I typed. This is hardly new for a rabid social media user like me. Self-censorship had always made me feel that we have reached our lowest ebb. But a recent news report was such that I was at a loss for words.

It said that a coterie of operatives has hit the road to find out the artiste(s) who painted a series of graffiti depicting 'Subodh'—or conscience—in the form of an ill-fated man on Dhaka's walls.

Certain quarters are wary of something fishy, the report goes on, and they believe it to be the work of an anarchist element, which, if not controlled, could induce fear in people's mind. How and why they have made such an assessment is hardly understandable. When I first came across 'Subodh', fear was the last thing that came to mind.

It deeply resonates with us, the youth, for reasons inexplicable. With a cage confining the sun under his right arm, the man is urged to run away and not come back ever, for time is not in his favour, for humans have forgotten how to love, for his luck has run out.

In one of the artworks, Subodh finds himself behind bars, with an aside that reads "sinfulness is entrenched in human minds." The sun in the cage, at times, looks golden yellowish, heralding the dawn. Other times, it is



PHOTO: DAILY PROTHOM ALO

Subodh deeply resonates with the youth and represents different things to different people.

red, as if summoning the dusk.

Many compare this exquisite street art with that of Banksy, the anonymous England-based graffiti artist. I'm perhaps not the best person to review artwork, but Banksy's is more straightforward and carries a specific political message. Subodh, on the other hand, is familiar yet enigmatic.

We all agree that the artwork contains meaning, but the interpretation varies from person to person. Some say it depicts the minorities who are finding it increasingly harder to live in their ancestral land. Some believe Subodh is the face of the dissenting voice or free speech under siege. To me, Subodh

represents our collective conscience.

That said, 'HOBEBI?'—which translates to "Will it happen?" in English—the signature that sometimes accompanies Subodh, is genuinely ambiguous. What will happen? It's a question puzzling enough to bother the inquisitors, too.

The last two graffiti works are more intriguing. Unlike all the previous works that featured a despondent and hopeless Subodh, the new ones appear to evoke hope or aspiration. With him now is a little girl who asks him, "Subodh, when will dawn arrive?" The next graffiti depicts the sun about to exit the cage, with a rooster crowing desperately—a sign that dawn may

finally be here.

It appears the entire thing has been interpreted by some a whole lot differently, and a bit too seriously. A security analyst was quoted by the newspaper in its report as saying, "It was drawn to instil fear among the public. This is propaganda—a strategy to elicit fright." He senses subversion. Another noted political commentator admits that it is "difficult" to decipher the graffiti, but he offers a historical event, in which four pieces of *ruti*—or bread—carried a particular symbolic significance.

The matter, as it stands now, has come to this: Whoever is masquerading as a graffiti artist, "plotting" some kind

of subversive activity, must be detained. The absurdity of it reminds a friend of mine of a book, *Matigari*, written by famous Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Matigari*, named after its central character, is the story of a freedom fighter who seeks to find his family and rebuild his home in his newly liberated country. However, he soon realises that the state he helped become independent is still ruled by the corrupt. Then rumour springs up of a superhuman in quest of true liberation, stoking rebellion to take up arms against the regime of the day.

The novel, although a fictional account, alarmed the then Kenyan despot, President Daniel arap Moi, to such an extent that he issued an arrest warrant against Matigari, a fictional character. Unable to arrest someone who only exists in the pages of a novel, the dictator, in the words of Jeff Turrentine, "had to settle for the next best thing: seizing all copies of the novel that bore his name and—to use a normally intransitive verb that has found its transitive form in the vocabulary of despots—'disappearing' them."

What is common between Subodh and Matigari is their mysterious identity. Subodh invokes the same questions as Matigari's.

"Who is Matigari? They asked one another. How on earth are we going to recognise him? What does he look like? What nationality is he? Is Matigari a man or woman anyway? Is he young or old? Is he fat or thin? Is he real or just a figment of people's imagination? Who or what really is Matigari ma Njiruungi? Is he a person, or is it a spirit?"

To me, Subodh is a spirit—something that never runs away.

Nazmul Ahasan is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

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# The #MeToo campaign: Only a start



FARDINA HABIB

TALES of global-media-mogul Harvey Weinstein's decades of sexual abuse of women in Hollywood have been unravelling over the last few weeks. With every passing day new stories are coming out, and more and more women are finding the courage to come out with the truth of their own harrowing experiences with Weinstein. While it is a sad testament to the state of our world that all these women have had to suffer for years in absolute silence, at least they will finally get some justice; or so we hope. In a world where a man gets elected as president after having bragged about sexually abusing women, we can really only hope.

Following the global backlash against Weinstein and with focus back on sexual abuse, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." Within 24 hours, the hashtag was tweeted at least half a million times, with countless men showing their support as well. It is heartening to see so many women starting to speak about that which we as young girls were always taught to keep hidden away, for fear of "public shame".

Sexual harassment is not a new, nor a simple phenomenon.



SOURCE: YOURSTORY.COM

Weinstein's case, and cases like it are not even the tip of the iceberg. Powerful men have historically always seized that which they desired, be that women or any other form of booty—make no mistake, it is this perspective of viewing women as property, something to be owned, that leads to much of this kind of sexual abuse. Womanisers are often applauded for similar actions by a large portion of the public, and the women are vilified or even pilloried. Nonetheless, relentless abusers like them only constitute a small portion of the problem.

Few among us are lucky enough to be born of the female gender and reach adulthood without having experienced any form of sexual abuse or harassment. While most of the perpetrators are people

we tend to know or trust, it is the streets and marketplaces of our cities that are truly full of horrors. Some years ago, I heard a particular line in some insipid American TV show, which really cut me to my core: A female character was telling her male counterpart, "you know the worst thing you fear when you think about going to prison, well we women fear that every time we leave the house". I had always known that men and women lived completely different lives, but not until that moment had it dawned on me just how different.

If one half of the population has to live in fear of the other, then there is something seriously wrong with our world. There will always be criminals and villains of all sorts around us, but if we women have to

live in fear of sexual abuse or harassment from any random man, then whatever is wrong is embedded deep in our culture or in our biology. The latter, the biological explanation, has to be false; if for no other reason than the fact that our species has survived innumerable challenges for the last hundred

millennia with astounding success. That would not have happened if only half the species were invested in that success.

Without pursuing the anthropological origins for the cultural embeddedness of this violence, we can state with some certainty, just as people like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and a host of others have, that much of this comes from identifying both women and their "chastity" as some form of private property. While civil society today gasps with incredulity when they hear of such archaic practices as checking for a young girl's chastity by checking her wedding sheets for virginal blood, these same people revel in "lighthearted" jokes that shame a woman with a mind of her own. Take for example a very common joke which goes: A key that can open many locks is called a master key, but a lock that can be opened by many keys is a shitty lock. Not only do these jokes instantly turn women into "booty",

but they also turn abusive philanderers into heroes.

We live in a better world today than that in which our predecessors did. One does not even require perusing through tomes like psychologist Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, to see that a world where women get together and start casting off "shame" that was never theirs to begin with, and start speaking openly about their pain, is better than the one where they were gagged. But we still have a long way to go before any of us, or all of us, feel safe; before we women feel safe standing among a group of men, as any random man feels standing among a group of women. The #MeToo campaign is only a start, and we await a cultural revolution which shall change the way women and their sexuality is viewed by our male counterparts.

Fardina Habib is currently working as a branding expert in the corporate sector.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**KIRAN DESAI**  
AUTHOR

The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Glided
- 5 Trumpet accessories
- 10 Window section
- 11 Beta carotene, for one
- 13 October birthstone
- 14 Wrinkle
- 15 Libya neighbor
- 17 North Pole worker
- 18 Exceptional
- 19 Fish eggs
- 20 Sleeve filler
- 21 Sullen
- 22 Edinburgh natives
- 25 Lahr and Parks
- 26 Make roads
- 27 Disencumber
- 28 Gorilla, for one
- 29 Comeback
- 33 Nasty dog
- 34 Hard to grasp
- 35 Go by
- 37 Diva's piece
- 38 Store business
- 39 Diplomatic skill
- 40 Sea birds
- 41 Fraternal group
- 6 Customary
- 7 Cruise in the movies
- 8 Akihito, for one
- 9 Successful show
- 12 Alludes
- 16 Formal salutation
- 21 Set aside for some purpose
- 22 Typewriter bar
- 23 Juliet's last name
- 24 Pigged out
- 25 Feeding time needs
- 27 Mutinies
- 29 Violinist's stuff
- 30 From the country
- 31 Dupe
- 32 Warm's up
- 36 Golf goal

**DOWN**

- 1 Leopard features
- 2 Absorb eagerly
- 3 Ridiculous
- 4 Fragile
- 5 Sister of Moses

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

PREFIX REDS  
REVIVE ICET  
IRONED LOCO  
MAKES TENOR  
ONES EEEYORE  
SPIN MUD  
PSEUDONYM  
BEE RENO  
ERASER TEMP  
RULER LEVEE  
ASIN CAPITA  
TENS AVATAR  
EDGE PEDALS

**VACANCY**

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Center of Excellence in Higher Education

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh, seeks applications for the following position:

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**Academic Qualification & Experience:** Excellent academic credentials; Master's degree with honours preferably in Business Administration / English / Social Sciences from a reputable university. PhD preferred. Minimum 10 years of work experience at university level of which at least 5 years in examinations controlling related works and 5 years in universities academic/ administration level. Candidates should be conversant with Private University Act and should have high level of computer literacy.

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- To carry out all works related to the conduct of University Examinations in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Ordinance and Regulations and by the Academic Council and the Syndicate and other designated committees; maintain link with Deans and Department Chairs on plans, programs and schedule.
- To be the custodian of all Question Papers, Examination scripts, Certificates and Diplomas, Mark Sheets, Tabulation Sheets and all records pertaining to Examinations.
- To authenticate Certificates and Diplomas issued by the University.
- To supervise staff and efficiently run the Office of the Controller of Examinations.
- Any other works assigned by the Authority.

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NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY  
Bashundhara, Dhaka – 1229  
E-mail: nsuhr@northsouth.edu

www.northsouth.edu