

IN MEMORIAM MASUD SADIQUE

Tribute to a patriot

AHRAR AHMAD

MASUD Sadique (Chullu bhai), who left us on October 16, was a freedom fighter. While we all occupy multiple identities in our lives, some stand out more sharply, and are more cherished, than others. For most of the people engaged in the Liberation War of 1971, it is that experience alone that perhaps defines them more than anything else. Many of them have gone on to become successful businessmen, teachers, public intellectuals, professionals, civil servants, human rights activists, cultural personalities and politicians; some went abroad, and some returned to their old haunts and withdrew into the quiet folds of family and faith. But every single one of them recalls, and fondly relives, those “golden days” (as novelist Tahmima Anam calls them) when the better angels of their nature drove them into desperate acts of sacrifice, courage and commitment. For a brief shining moment they had commanded history, became its owner and not its object, and changed it with a moral clarity and a collective vision that was as innocent as it was inspiring.

Chullu bhai reflected the best of that time—what we can justifiably call “our greatest generation” (the term Tom Brokaw used to describe the American soldiers who fought against the Nazis in Europe). He was willing to die for his country and the cause of freedom in which he fervently believed. Perhaps, even more profoundly, like so many other unlikely, even at times reluctant,



From left to right: Major Ansar, Dr Ahrar Ahmed (writer), Zia, Fateh Ali, Sabek Singh, Habibul Alam, Major Haider, Shahdat Chowdhury, Masud Sadique Chullu, and fellow comrade (who could not be identified).

revolutionaries, he was willing to kill for those purposes. For young men and women who typically cringed even at the thought of violence and, in all likelihood, were philosophically opposed to it, to take up arms against a ruthless enemy, without any military or psychological preparation for it, remains an incredible testimony to their passion for their country and its people.

I will leave it to others more competent, more directly involved, to comment on Chullu bhai's skills and resourcefulness in combat, or about the exploits of the justifiably famous Crack Platoon to which he belonged.

But there is absolutely no doubt that the group's operations in Dhaka city rudely shook the “normalcy narrative” being peddled by the Pakistani generals, and also helped to shatter the aura of invulnerability that, as Frantz Fanon had argued, kept colonised people in thrall, fear and defeat. Consequently, its role in the war cannot, and must not, be judged in quantitative terms only, or merely through reciting the details of its various “actions”. Every movement needs stories, whispers, folklore, and legends which bind the people together, sustain hope, and encourage confidence in the symbolic battlefield

of the mind (where most wars are won and lost). These intrepid soldiers provided those elements to us. The people of Bangladesh dared to believe, because these freedom fighters dared to continue. Chullu bhai, as an integral part of that effort, deserves to be called our hero.

When he was captured, he did not buckle. He endured unspeakable cruelties that were inflicted on him. But, while the Pakistani military could torture his body, they could not break his will, or corrupt his honour. That, by itself, is remarkable. But what makes it even more so is that he was never bitter, or ever

demanding revenge. I suspect that if some of his tormenters were presented to him, Chullu bhai would probably shake his finger at them and say, “what you did was wrong” and walk away, fully convinced that being reminded of a person's own evil would be the ultimate punishment he could impose on a human being. The challenges of captivity could not tarnish the simple heroism of his ethical integrity.

The true nature of his nobility was demonstrated on a daily, routine, mundane basis. It consisted of the many things he did, which he did not have to. He did not have to be compassionate towards the less fortunate, but he did, demonstrating the largeness of his heart in myriad and surreptitious ways. He did not have to be so thoughtful and supportive of those who were inconsequential and of no practical use to him (like me, for example), but he did, showering them with the gift of his praise and affection, and the occasional basket of the best fruits one could find anywhere. He did not have to remember those who may have played only minor roles in his life (my father was part of his defence team during his 1971 court trial), but he did, and always referred to him as *chacha jan* to indicate the intimacy and respect he wanted to convey.

But his biggest acts of heroism were contained in his steadfast refusal to compromise on who he was. He remained “old style”, self-effacing, classy. What distinguished him from almost anyone else, and what he exemplified, perhaps exuded, was *sharafat*—his

refinement of dress and comportment, his unfailing courteousness (often bordering on courtly elegance), his softness of voice and temperance of speech, his commitment to fairness and the moral imperative, his embrace and celebration of the finer things in life, his transparent sincerity and beguiling charm, his child-like simplicity and delicate humour, and his personal warmth and graciousness that were as spontaneous as they were lavish.

In a time and place where many people cultivate interests rather than friendships, seek attention through conspicuous consumption and garish displays of wealth, status and power, and undertake public service for strategic photo-ops or to pursue private agendas, Chullu bhai preferred to look after animals in his home like a caring parent, to regularly feed the birds which rested on his roof top, to grow orchids and tend to plants. (I have often felt that he would have been a worthy follower of the naturalist tradition of St Francis of Assisi, even though he had always been a meticulously observant Muslim).

Till the end Chullu bhai remained fiercely true to himself—a quintessential gentleman who was humble, enlightened, decent, and authentic. He made the world a better place not only by doing what is good but also, perhaps more so, by simply being what he chose to be. Rest in peace valiant freedom fighter, friend, hero.

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Testing the limits of sexual harassment



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SHIFTING IMAGES
EARLIER this month, *The New York Times* published an explosive story on allegations of sexual harassment against

Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. The report was based on accounts of multiple women accusing him of all forms of sexual misdemeanour ranging from rape to verbal abuse. Weinstein, a prominent and powerful executive in the cinema world, has more than 300 Oscar-winning movies to his credit.

Although his sexual misconduct was an open secret, the gory details of the revelations generated a shock wave, leading to his firing from Miramax and Weinstein Corporation, a company he co-founded.

Weinstein's story is not the only one that has been brought to public attention in the recent past. Fox News host Bill O'Reilly, his boss Roger Ailes and TV icon Bill Cosby have also been accused of sexual abuse.

Interestingly, the profile of the male predator fits a pattern—powerful, charismatic and egotistical in the belief that he is invincible. The victims are typically career women, struggling artists, and budding professionals. These women are now in the eye of the media storm that is raging across the

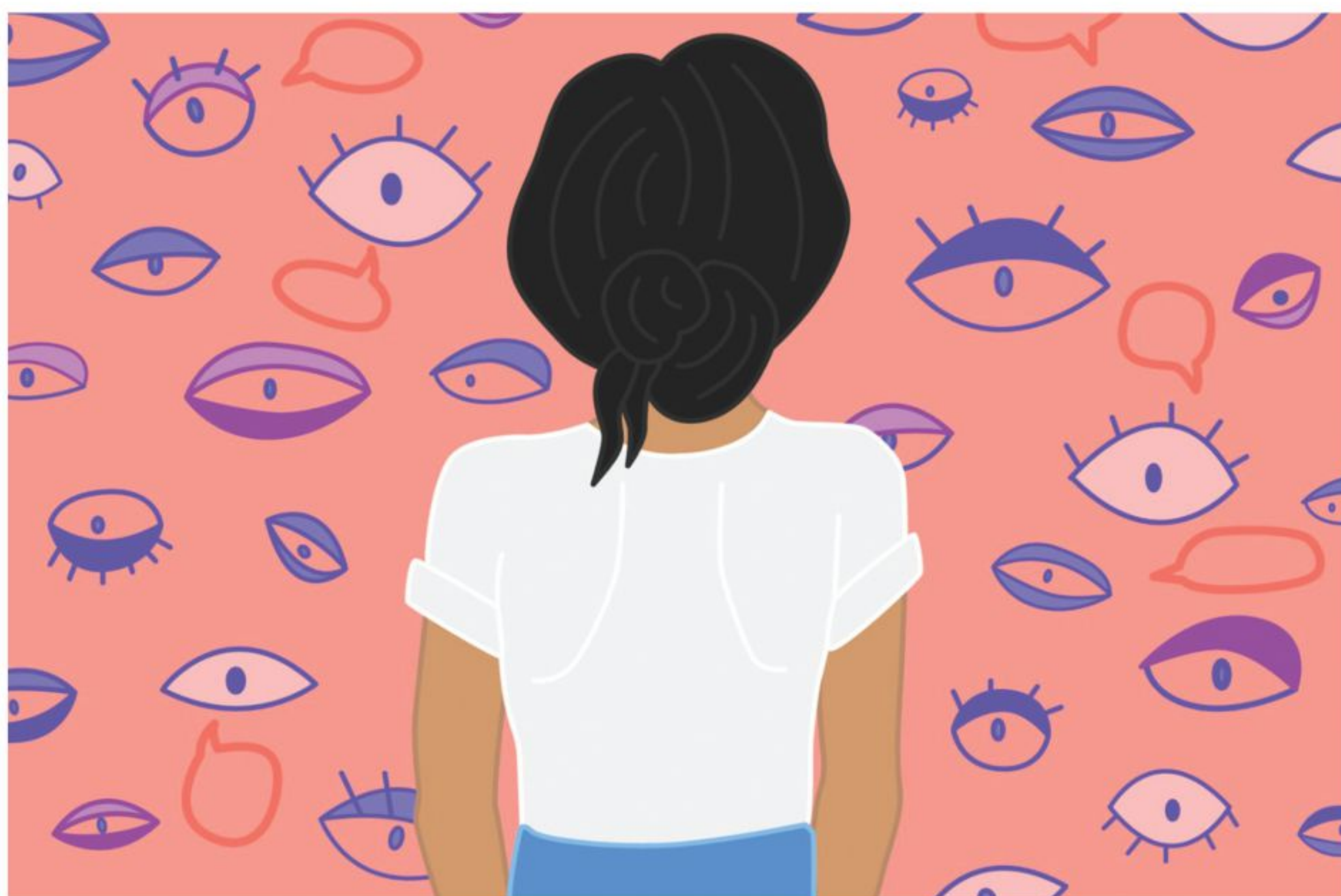
corporate industry as well as social circles. While many are praising the victims for their courage in stepping forward, they have also been on the receiving end of severe criticism, mostly from other women.

The critics focus on two issues: a) why didn't the women say “no”; and b) why did most of them wait so long before making their allegations public. Personally, I am outraged at the insensitivity of these criticisms, since there is a tendency to pass the blame onto the victim rather than address the larger issue of a male dominated, misogynistic social and work environment where women are always at a disadvantage. The truth is that not all women are in a position to ward off the advances of men who can retaliate by firing them or even ruining their lives and careers. Also, sexual offenders often resort to physical force or emotional blackmail to coerce women.

Some victims said that they suspected that, after they rejected Weinstein's advances or complained about him, he had them removed from projects or dissuaded people from hiring them. According to sources, Weinstein was frequently heard bragging about planting negative news in media outlets about those who spoke against him.

However, there are women who do say “No” either because they have a choice or because they make the difficult choice of not pursuing their career dreams and goals!

Many ask why women wait for



years before making their accusations public. The truth is that the abused women suffer from intense shame and guilt—emotions that predators exploit. A 2015 study found that one in three women have been sexually harassed and that 71 percent did not report it. A woman is placed in a double bind when harassed in the workplace. It affects her sense of self, but she needs the job, and until a

better opportunity comes along, she has no choice but to endure. Besides, a prospective employer is likely to steer away from an applicant claiming she quit her previous job because she was sexually harassed.

Unfortunately, there is also a cultural complicity at business places where other employees are more or less aware of sexual predators, but they either abet the crime or look the

other way. Hence, a woman often feels isolated and powerless. Even when she complains to an HR person, she is asked to produce evidence. And evidence is usually “his” word against “hers” – with a high probability that the man is believed to be innocent unless proven guilty.

It would not be fair if I did not admit that in some cases, men are

accused of exploitative behaviour when none has occurred. As more women enter the workforce, interpersonal interactions between genders have become a landmine-laden experience in which good intentions may be misconstrued.

Many women are frustrated and discouraged by the fact that we live in a world where one of the most powerful nations elected a president who was heard on tape bragging about how he “groped” women who actually let them do it because he is a “star”. Let us, however, draw courage from the fact that recent disclosures about sexual misdemeanour by public figures have resulted in not only social opprobrium but also a removal from their positions of influence. Women have thus been somewhat emboldened to share their traumatic experiences with others. But the recent revelations may be the tip of the iceberg, for Weinstein is just one producer and O'Reilly is just one TV host. We cannot help but wonder how many more predators are still roaming free and how many more women are being violated each day, with impunity.

Will things ever change? Not unless we change the culture where women are debased, humiliated and commoditised as objects of pleasure not just in the business world, but also in their homes and in society.

Milia Ali is a Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

A WORD A DAY



MONDEGREEN
noun

A misunderstood or misinterpreted word or phrase resulting from a mishearing of the lyrics of a song.

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