

The Rise of Hate



SHIFTING IMAGES
MILIA ALI

IN the "long 18th century" (1685-1815), European politics, philosophy, science and communications were radically reoriented during the course of a movement referred to by its participants as the Age of Reason, or simply the

Enlightenment. The American and French Revolutions were directly inspired by Enlightenment ideals. Nineteenth-century liberalism and classicism, and 20th-century modernism all owe a heavy debt to the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Unfortunately, the natural strides that human civilisation should have made towards higher enlightenment have not materialised. In fact, it appears that we are regressing into an age where violence, bigotry and fanaticism are on the rise in almost all societies. Yes, we are living in dangerous times—an Age of Hate!

The explosion of Internet use and electronic media raised unprecedented hopes for the world transforming into a "global village" of ideas and interactions. Expectations ran high that the free and "real-time" exchange of experiences, and denser global communication between communities and nations would morph into a more unified and tolerant world. Regrettably, our optimism seems to have been misplaced. Today, societies are perilously polarised. A culture of intolerance has taken hold in countries as diverse as the United States, the Philippines, India, Brazil, and the Arab world and Europe.

Faced with despondency, I began to search for answers as to why hate and



ILLUSTRATION: DMITRIY POGORELOV/BEHANCE

selfishness are in ascendancy and why decency has retreated into the background. There are no easy answers but let me bounce off a few ideas with my reader audience to be able to stimulate a discussion on a critical issue that may be tearing at the moral fibre of our world.

Let's start by admitting that hate always existed but it was hidden in the subterranean levels of our consciousness unless ignited by extreme conditions. Over the last few years, hate has not only taken a blatant form, but has been accepted as "normal" behaviour. It's part of the political and religious discourse in the form of xenophobia, racist slurs, homophobia or sheer bigotry. I attribute this partly to the erosion of moral authority globally; in the past, the voices against bigotry and discrimination were loud and clear.

Leaders, no matter what their beliefs, spoke about inclusiveness, tolerance and empathy. But today we live in a world where the president of the United States, supposedly "the world's moral leader", indulges in the worst forms of hate-mongering. During his campaign he described Mexicans as "rapists", Muslims as "terrorists", and Africans as belonging to "sh*tholes". From the anti-Semitic attack on a Jewish

wounds. If we remain unaware of the plight of children in war-torn Yemen, we cannot take action to help or raise our voices against the injustices. Hence blissful ignorance is not an option these days. How we respond to the news is, of course, our choice—rather than get angry and upset we could react with courage and compassion.

We saw this happening in the recent midterm elections in the United States where people at the grassroots level banded together and handed the House of Representatives to the more inclusive party that will strive to save healthcare and benefits for the disadvantaged groups. This wave of change was initiated and promoted by women, minorities and ordinary people at the community and local levels.

Perhaps therein lies part of the solution to the problem of rising hate and violence. When leaders fail us, the citizens must become more informed, galvanise into action and strive to bring about change. In the long run what will sustain the human race is empathy and trust, not divisiveness and hatred. That is what history has taught us time and again.

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Can we do something about Dhaka's unbearable noise pollution?



Vehicles account for about three-quarters of all noise in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR



NAWSHAD AHMED

THE alarmingly high level of noise pollution in Dhaka city calls for urgent attention of the authorities as well as the people at large. With the increasing number of vehicles including

motorcycles on the capital's roads in recent years, the honking of cars has reached an unbearable limit and is a source of major discomfort for city dwellers. The question is whether the drivers of these vehicles understand the impact of mostly unnecessary honking on the general environment and on the people around them. Due to so much traffic congestion in almost all parts of the city, impatient drivers are seen honking incessantly which, almost always, does not have much of an effect.

Although there are several sources of noise pollution such as loudspeakers, building construction, street markets, mechanical workshops and small factories, vehicles are a major factor as they account for about three-quarters of all noise in the city. In addition to car horns, worn-out vehicles and poorly maintained car engines cause a lot of noise as well.

In technical terms, noise above 50 decibels can adversely affect public health, especially those individuals who suffer from hypertension and heart disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) cautions that any sound above 60 decibels can temporarily make a person deaf and prolonged exposure to sound above 100 decibels can cause hearing impairments. Several empirical studies have found sound levels ranging between 70 and 120 decibels in selected Dhaka city road intersections. According to the Noise Pollution (Control) Rules 2006, the acceptable sound limit is 50 decibels during the daytime and 45 decibels in the nighttime in residential areas of the city.

It is not only in the main thoroughfares where noise pollution is a problem; careless drivers continue to use their car horns in an insensitive manner—without thinking about the effects on people of old age, babies, students and the sick—near hospitals, clinics and schools. Car honking starts very early in the morning and

continues unabated until midnight in many parts of the capital.

Many commercial and business activities like car workshops, welding shops, flour mills, etc., are allowed to operate and in fact are expanding in every residential area of the city. Vehicles going to and coming out of schools, hospitals and shopping malls situated inside residential areas cause traffic congestion as well as serious noise pollution for the residents in these areas. Again, the drivers of four-wheel vehicles and motorcycles have little consideration for the fact that they are inside residential areas and thus should not use vehicle horns frequently. But it seems that both drivers and passengers are indifferent to this fact. It is apparent that the general public is

not to use their horns so frequently. It shows how difficult it is to change drivers' attitudes towards honking.

City dwellers quietly accept the high noise levels which is quite unfortunate. A substantial reduction in noise levels is definitely possible. We should consider noise pollution as a serious concern and take action to keep it within limits to reduce the adverse effects of it.

At one point in the past, horn-free zones were created and signboards were put up in several areas of the city. However, due to the absence of proper monitoring and awareness-building, those attempts were not successful. In addition to banning horns in some selected areas, blaring of horns should be stopped near all hospitals, educational institutions, inside residential areas and office blocks. In Kolkata, to give an example of a similar situation, any area within a 100-metre radius of a hospital, nursing home, educational institution, library or the court is officially designated as a "silence zone". Kolkata has also imposed a fine for unnecessary honking.

Besides controlling the honking of vehicles, the fitness of all vehicles including buses, minibuses, trucks and three-wheelers should be checked on a regular basis. Other noise-polluting sources need to be identified and appropriate instructions should be provided to them to control their noise levels. The use of mics should be limited to certain purposes only and there need to be restrictions on the use of loudspeakers for social events such as weddings and birthdays inside residential areas after a certain time of the day.

The Noise Pollution (Control) Rules 2006 should be implemented strictly with the help of the traffic police, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ministry of Home Affairs and Dhaka City Corporations which need to join hands and enforce the law and make Dhaka a bit more liveable. A general awareness campaign should be rolled out, particularly targeting drivers and vehicle owners, on the health consequences of noise pollution. While the government has the responsibility to control noise pollution, we as citizens need to also consciously use our judgment before using vehicle horns as well as educate our drivers.

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unaware of the impact of noise pollution on their health and do not see how it can affect blood pressure, cause headaches, nausea, and insomnia.

In busy residential areas, loudspeakers are used to advertise goods and services; microphones are used to celebrate weddings and cultural functions; musical stores advertise their collections by playing popular songs nonstop; and construction workers break bricks and stones on their sites, without any consideration for the effects on passersby and inhabitants.

From discussions with several conscious vehicle owners, this writer gathered that they constantly asked their drivers to stop honking on the street and it took them several weeks to fully convince the drivers

QUOTABLE Quote

NAWAL EL SAADAWI (b.1931)
EGYPTIAN FEMINIST WRITER AND ACTIVIST

She is free to do what she wants, and free not to do it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 34 "Das Kapital" author
- 16 Chess piece
- 35 Lamb's father
- 18 Sunup site
- 38 Nanny's warning
- 19 Treats for terriers
- 41 Letter after Yankee
- 20 Fan's favourite
- 42 Conjures up
- 22 Natural fuel
- 43 "Yeah, right!"
- 23 Exile isle
- 44 Hampers
- 25 Street urchin
- 45 "Hey, you!"
- 29 "Miracle Mets" pitcher

DOWN

- 1 Empire's foes
- 30 Blend
- 2 Test type
- 33 Attire
- 3 Nightstick
- 34 Put together
- 4 Runner on snow
- 36 Pub choices
- 5 Fills beyond full
- 37 Pound hound
- 6 Searches
- 38 Garden part
- 7 Coffee dispensers
- 39 Preceding period
- 8 Long time
- 40 Very popular
- 9 "Exodus" hero
- 41 Pizzazz

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