

#MeToo, and the process of healing and self-care

SHUCHEESMITA SIMONTI

For almost a decade, I tried not to recall the traumatising events as much as I could. I did share it with a few friends when the trauma resurfaced now and then, but never completely. Every time I came across a movie on child sexual abuse, or news on the matter, my blood boiled in anger—the anger stemming from being able to relate, the anger I felt for my inability to speak up.

When I was sexually abused by this man who was a father figure to me, I was a teenager from a broken family dealing with a number of issues. I was an introvert in nature, and still am. But at that age, growing up in a patriarchal



However, I still did not have the courage or the strength to talk about this one particular event which had affected me the most.

A year later, the #MeToo movement created havoc in Bollywood. I was following the updates, but I did not think it would be possible in Bangladesh. Then one day, I heard about Prioty, an Irish-Bangladeshi model, who shared her story of experiencing abuse at a young age. She spoke up three years after her traumatising incident. Her story gave me the final push that I needed to break my silence of 11 years. Shivering with anxiety, as I shared my post on social media, I still did not have the confidence to write the abuser's name; I used his initials. I cried my heart out that night as I went to sleep. A part of me was reliving the pain, while another part of me felt unburdened.

Next morning, when I checked my Facebook, I saw my post had gone viral. My inbox was flooded with messages—many wanted to know who it was, while some had already guessed. My mother had disclosed the name already on her Facebook timeline, and there were many who were expressing solidarity. But there were also those who started victim blaming. Some blamed me directly, and some put the blame on my family—as if in the history of Bangladesh, I was the only person to have experienced child sexual abuse and that it did not happen to children whose parents lived together.

It was initially a bit overwhelming, but now, 11 years later, I'm not the same person. I am not the 16-year-old shattered teenager anymore. Yes, the trauma still resonates within me, but now I know what happened to me does not define me. I have managed to move away from the toxic environment and start working on building a life for myself, an identity of my own. So even though I did experience the slut-shaming and online trolling after speaking up, I at least knew how to deal with the stress, and how to try and regulate my emotions.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”
—Audre Lorde

After speaking up, I felt several emotions flooding my mind and I needed to regulate them, with my thesis submission knocking at the door. I feared falling sick with intense emotions overwhelming me.

he got to touch me inappropriately, the best I could do was push his hand away and ignore him.

I felt hopeless and lived with the fear that he may rape me at the next opportune moment. The only person I had confided in at that time was the domestic help in our house. She was a great support and looked out for me. She often kept chores, such as cleaning up my room pending, and would [pretend to] recall them only when he paid a visit. With her help, I managed to prevent anything unfortunate happening to me. But repeated occurrences heightened my insecurities, and affected my studies. With my disappointing grades, I lost hope that I could ever escape my miserable life in Dhaka. Even after he disappeared from my life, I was haunted by the trauma his perverted behaviour had inflicted upon me. The trauma is still there.

“Your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom.” - Rumi

Years later, I found solace in trying to contribute towards this cause by volunteering online with an NGO. I felt my pain turning into a burning motivation to raise awareness about sexual abuse and how to prevent it. But I did not feel it was enough. The abuser went on living his life, but I was still haunted by the trauma. He was close to my family, and I did not know how to raise this issue at all. Years had passed; I was a college graduate. I tried to alleviate my pain and help others in similar situations, but I did not know how to help myself, how to heal myself, and how to call out my abuser. I never imagined it would be possible.

Then came the era of #MeToo.

In 2017, I too expressed solidarity and wrote briefly about different forms of sexual harassment I had experienced.



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society in which violence is so normalised in our day-to-day lives, I did not know how to stand up for myself; I did not trust people enough to ask for help. As a young girl coming from a family that had fallen apart, I often felt marginalised everywhere I went—the tuitions, at family gatherings, around the neighbourhood and so on. My lack of self-esteem only added to my misery. When this man used every opportunity

Continued to page 17