

Humanity Shattered



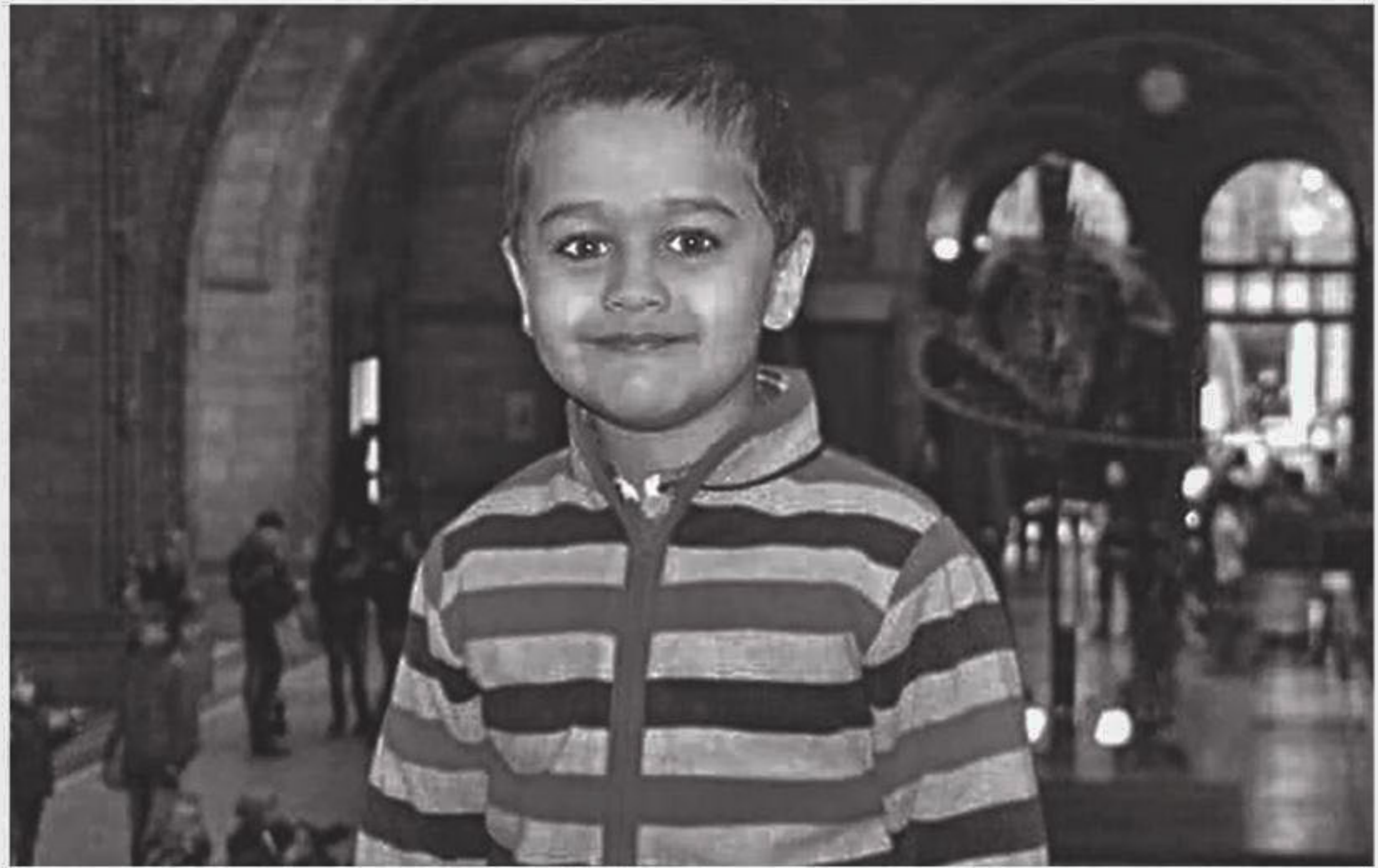
TEARFULLY YOURS
NAVEED MAHBUB

WHEN I check into a hotel, the first thing I do is people watch, and I do so with a smile. I play a game with myself to see if I can guess the reason why this particular person or group of people is at that hotel. The guessing game is easier if it's around a big holiday, more so, if the holiday is on a weekend, and bingo, if there are frazzled parents in colourful casual outfits trying to control their squealing kids who are running around like being freed from a zoo. For school is indeed a zoo and a posh hotel in a beautiful country known as none other than a welcoming holiday destination is indeed the farthest a first grader can be from the confines and the rigours of school.

I wouldn't be surprised if others, even the tensed business traveller, take a moment to play the guessing game.

But I wonder what game, if at all, is being played by the man checking in with a heavy backpack. He is not concerned about bills, or the mini-bar, or the spa, or the name under which he is checking in. He probably avoids the bell-boy so as to himself carry his "precious" cargo to his room. I am not sure what kind of a human he is, for he is focused on one thing alone. He is focused on reaching "paradise".

Paradise. That is what we all hope for, regardless of how knowingly we know that what we are doing is plain wrong—lying, backbiting, bribing, cursing, slapping, hitting, spitting, yelling, hurting, stealing, embezzling, favouring, cheating, raping, killing, breaching, corrupting, infracting, burning, violating, breaking, tearing,



Zayan Chowdhury

depriving, abandoning, infringing, shooting, stabbing, bludgeoning, racketeering, trespassing, occupying, wronging, scamming...We still hope against hope that the Creator will forgive and forget and have the ultimate reward for us.

There are a thousand stimuli and a zillion visual cues around him to sway his emotions or to even have a change of heart—little children, aging grandparents, selfless parents, smiling servers... But he remains steadfast. Who knows, maybe he himself has such people in his life, but he is too "selfless" (selfish to the sane) to be

swayed by his emotions for them. For he believes, and the belief made possible by who knows what twisted logic, that he will reach Paradise by detonating explosives while in queue at the breakfast buffet, blowing himself and all around him, including those heart-melting, beautiful children who every religion and belief labels as angels, into smithereens. To his unfathomably warped logic, that is the path to his achieving Paradise, while taking hostage a religion that he himself claims to have embraced, a religion that clearly states: "If you take a soul, it is as though

you have killed the whole of humanity." Let's not even get into suicide, an act of killing that is worse than killing.

But he is also supposedly "avenging" Christchurch, New Zealand—a country, a city and a community of all mixes to have wept silently, accepted tragedy with grace and even had one survivor having lost his wife forgiving the man who, to Jacinda Arden, is nameless.

One scratches the head as to fathom what has the children at the Colombo hotel got to do with the unfathomable mission of the perpetrators of the concurrent bombings. What have these children done? What has Sri Lanka done? What have the holiday-makers done? What have the peaceful worshippers at the churches done? What has the server at the buffet done?

I personally never knew nor met one particular first grader from Bangladesh who happily went to Colombo only to have the time of his life. But just like the image of the lifeless Aylan Kurdi lying face down on a beach in Turkey that slapped humanity into the realisation of humanity being washed ashore, to me, and to perhaps many a father and mother of little children, the face of Zayan Chowdhury has put a face to the continuing senseless tragedy of humanity being shattered.

The man detonating his belt or backpack at the crowded buffet-line thought differently. But if the pits of hell allow its inhabitants one glance at the innocent faces of those they have robbed of life, let alone of the surviving loved ones who have been thrown into a living hell on earth, I still wonder, if there will be any remorse in those disciples of the devil, who, echoing the PM of New Zealand, shall remain nameless...

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Relearning our history through the stories of women



SHAVEENA ANAM

Mother likes to tell a story about the time a colleague brought his son to work and introduced her as his boss, to which the child

scrunched up his face and said, "Eta kono boss holo? Boss toh chhele hoi." His assumption that bosses can only be men was probably formed by the images and stories that he had grown up with. Children understand and project gender roles through the role-models they are exposed to through media and books. The stories and examples we present them with, go on to manifest themselves throughout their entire lives. Planting the seed of mutual understanding and respect, ideally starts immediately, with story-time and discourse. It is up to us adult parents, siblings, teachers and friends to start rethinking how we teach and talk about history.

While there have always been female leaders and innovators, their contributions are often missing from the pages of our history books. Instead, they largely feature heroic men making discoveries, conquering new lands, winning wars, defeating marauding armies, and building civilisations. Socrates, Romulus, Alexander, Caesar, Akbar, Shahjahan, Gandhi, Jinnah, Mujib. This exclusion of women gives the impression that it is mostly men who make history, while women are bystanders. Such narratives, fed to us at different times of our lives, perpetuate sexist stereotypes and shape our perceptions of women and gender roles in society.

In all the lectures my father has given me about colonised India and Partition, he has waxed lyrical about Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, about Jinnah and Gandhi. But his lectures missed women like Kamini Roy, who led the struggle for women's suffrage



Kamini Roy (L), who led the struggle for women's suffrage in India, and Lila Nag, who set up the first women's self-defence training initiative when partition violence targeted women.



in India, or the revolutionary Lila Nag, who set up the first women's self-defence training initiative when partition violence targeted women and went on to play a major role in drafting the Indian Constitution.

In the playground, I was easily beaten at the "boys vs girls" debates, where my rowd opponents were able to name scientists, athletes and kings to prove their point and all I could come up with was Joan of Arc. I would have had some rebuttal ammunition if I had known about Nawab Begum Faizunnesa Choudhurani, the first female nawab, who built roads, established schools for girls, and patronised newspapers. I might have even won if I knew about engineers, Dora Rahman, Monowara and Shirin Sultana who fought and won a case in 1964 allowing women to study engineering at BUET.

In the classroom, we read the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam and simultaneously learned about their lives. I knew that Tagore was one of thirteen children and had won the Nobel Prize in Literature. That Nazrul, our rebel poet, was called *Dukhu Mia* as a child and fought in the British Army. On the other hand, while I could regurgitate *Chhoton ghumai, likhechhen Sufia Kamal*, I had no idea about her life, who she was, or her role in the creation of Bangladesh.

In college, when I first started to learn about feminist movements, I read the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and idolised Virginia Woolf, but was yet to discover Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain whose fearless *Abarodhbasini* critiqued the purdah system and the satirical *Sultana's Dream*, one of the first works of feminist science fiction,

imagined a world where the roles of men and women were reversed.

In photography courses I studied portraits taken by Nasir Ali Mamun but not of Bangladesh's first female photojournalist, Syeda Khanam who documented important events from the Liberation War, worked with Satyajit Ray and photographed famous personalities including Neil Armstrong and Queen Elizabeth, and was already enraging Muslim fundamentalists through her portrayal of women in the *Shaptahik Begum*.

These are just a few examples, but despite the impact borne by these women, their stories of struggle, resilience and victory have been largely absent from narratives in the media and in education. We have a rich history of audacious, defiant women who remained strong in

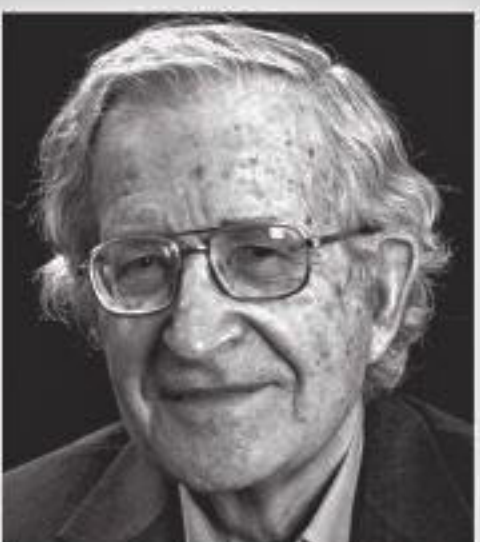
the face of social ostracism and violence. Their life and work challenged existing gender norms and inspired future generations of activists and changemakers. These women realised that real change would not take place without the equal participation of women and so created organisations, mobilised and armed themselves with the skills and knowledge to fight for their economic and intellectual independence. We now have a responsibility to tell their stories. In this age of the internet

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and boundless information, it is no excuse to blame our lack of knowledge on what was taught or not at school. Google their names, talk to your friends, children, cousins, siblings about them around the dinner-table, read books about them and by them. If you are in the education sector then include them in history and social science projects. Showcasing strong female role models can pave the way for girls to aspire to do anything and for boys to be more open minded about gender roles. The fight for equality can often seem daunting and impossible, but through this small but significant way, we can inspire future generations to build a safer, more egalitarian society.

Shaveena Anam works at HerStory Foundation and is co-editor of the blog, Taramon.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

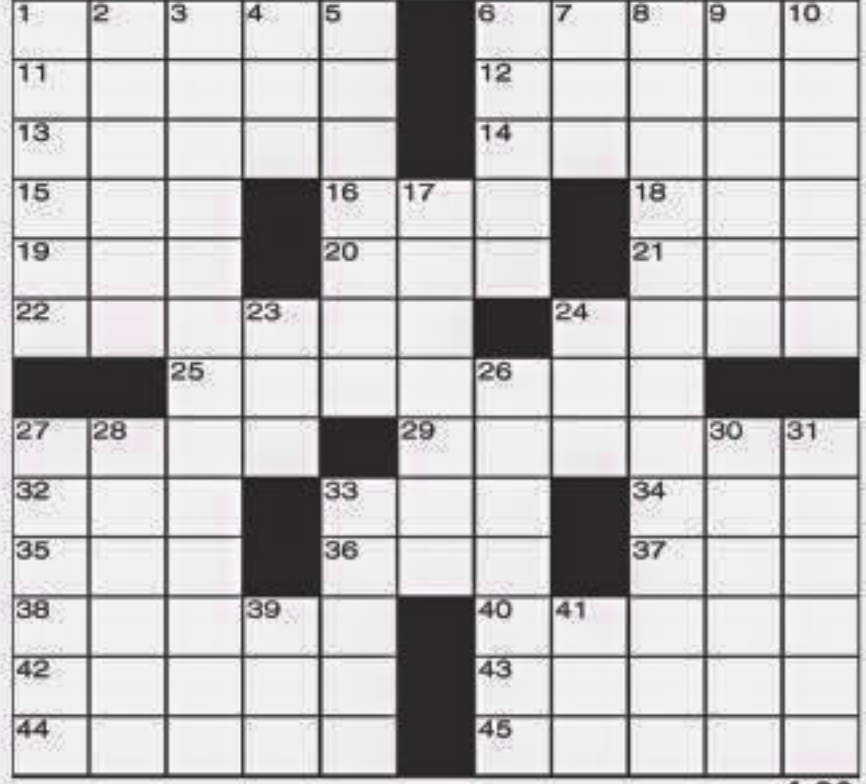


NOAM CHOMSKY
AMERICAN LINGUIST, PHILOSOPHER, COGNITIVE SCIENTIST AND HISTORIAN

"As long as the general population is passive, apathetic, diverted to consumerism or hatred of the vulnerable, then the powerful can do as they please, and those who survive will be left to contemplate the outcome."

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| ACROSS | Seville" composer | 3 Nannies' aids |
| 1 Rum cakes | 27 Saucy | 4 Mil. Address part |
| 6 Spoil | 29 Lacking vigor | 5 Rakes with gunfire |
| 11 Sprang | 32 Numerical prefix | 6 Like some fences |
| 12 Let up | 33 Pole worker | 7 Kimono closer |
| 13 Vine-covered shelter | 34 Genetic messenger | 8 Lilac blooms |
| 14 Rome's river | 35 Refrain syllable | 9 Relaxed |
| 15 Week part | 36 Zodiac cat | 10 Skin |
| 16 Perfect serve | 37 Unmatched | 17 Dealer's deal |
| 18 Orange tuber | 38 Letter before tau | 23 Dealer's place |
| 19 List-shortening abbr. | 40 Stair part | 24 Wallet bill |
| 20 Craze | 42 Porpoise's place | 26 Due to be punished |
| 21 Letter before omega | 43 Peace goddess | 27 Wears |
| 22 Varnish | 44 Nudged, like a horse | 28 Opera's Caruso |
| Coat | 45 Battery makeup | 30 Start a new paragraph |
| 24 Refinery rocks | DOWN | 31 Core groups |
| 25 "The Barber of | 1 Propeller parts | 33 Oryx's cousin |
| | 2 Pump full of bubbles | 39 West of Hollywood |
| | | 41 Rage |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C A C T I S C O O P
A D H O C O H A R E
P A I G E L A T E R
L A R D E R
P O D I R S P T A
A R C A N A S L I D
B L A C K S Q U A R E
L O R E T U N N E L
O N E V I A E S E
P E S O S E R A S E
A W A R E R A R E R
T E X T S S N E E R

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.