

Raising our boys to be good, healthy men

Breaking free from hyper masculinity



IQRA L. QAMARI

BOYS will be boys." This carefully constructed sentence consists of a mere collection of words. It dominates our dialogues, reflecting the mindset that governs our society, our homes and the misogynistic atmosphere that we breathe.

It is more than just a sentence though. It has become ingrained in our DNA. And each time this phrase is casually used—which is far too often, let me warn you—I try to analyse and scrutinise this four-worded sentence that perpetuates the acceptance and normalisation of patriarchy. It serves as a reminder, every time, that men—no matter the severity of the questionable acts they commit—can always seek refuge behind the shadow of these words: "Boys will be boys." The statement eventually matures into a more threatening version—"Men will be men"—which not only poses a threat to women, but also to the collective male psyche.

In the turn of this year, the American Psychological Association issued a set of guidelines meant for psychologists dealing with "traditional masculine ideologies." They point out the different behavioural patterns that are prevalent at the heart of the male culture that leads to multiple social ills, including destructive activities such as bullying and violence against women.

If we pick a typical household that believes in orthodox upbringing revolving around hyper-machismo, it would appear that the very behavioural patterns this study warns against are prevalent in the way boys are

raised in our society. Here, women play subdued roles, with their whole existence revolving around serving men. Little boys grow up seeing their paternal figures maintain a stoic comportment, rarely displaying signs of emotion—except when channelling rage or frustration, especially directed towards the female members. Their little minds are constantly shaped by instructions that demean the dominant traits in girls. "Boys should not cry like girls"; "boys should not wear pink"; and God forbid if they play with dolls and plastic kitchen sets. After all, they should steer clear from every activity that may make them look effeminate.

But do we ever wonder about the ramifications of such conditioning on the male psyche?

Here is what will happen. A boy who has been brought up in one such typical household will grow up suppressing his emotions, which will eventually pave the way for his fragile ego later in the future. He will grow up believing that subjugating women is one of the fundamentals of manhood. Not only will he take women for granted, but in the process, he will automatically objectify them; after all, the roots of masculinity in our social context are still linked to women's sexuality and the need to dominate them. The rising string of cases of sexual harassment is a testament to the crisis of confidence that many men suffer from when they feel rejected.

Let's put aside the repercussions this toxic mental framework has on the other gender, for argument's sake. Men themselves become victims of living within such rigidly defined boundaries of masculinity, as a result of being unable to express themselves. In order to maintain their "strength", they bottle up their emotions which can blow up on their faces.



SOURCE: WWW.FREEPIK.COM

Statistics from the Mental Health Foundation reveal that four out of five suicides are committed by men, and yet women are more prone to be diagnosed with mental health problems. This goes to show that men will not talk about their problems even when they suffer. The concept of toxic masculinity reinforces the fact that men cannot have or exude emotions and to do so would only make them appear "weak". This becomes a problem for them since going against the status quo would lead to other men mocking their so-called feminine attributes and they will eventually become outcasts.

There is no straightforward way of breaking this vicious cycle. Just walking up to a boy and asking him to reconnect with his emotions and open up will not help the cause. A counter-narrative must be established to show boys and men the better alternative, that is growing up with healthy emotions and outlook towards life.

Imagine a home where a young boy grows up seeing his parents sharing equal power dynamics. A relationship that is affectionate and respectful and where emotional connection and communication are encouraged by both parties. He is taught about the importance of consent and how

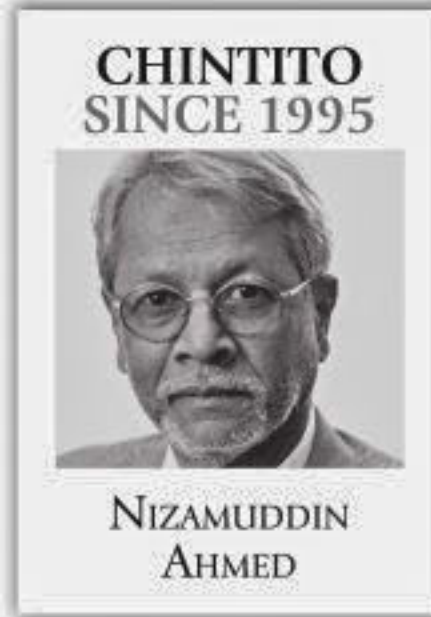
to cope with and respond to a "no". He is motivated to speak up against immoral acts and unhealthy male ideologies. And finally, he is sure of expressing himself and does not limit himself to societal perceptions about how girls and boys should behave. The product of such upbringing would not only make way for a healthy mindset but would also pave the way for a healthier society.

One factor that is often neglected is the need to include sex education in our education curriculum. But given the socio-political and religious environment in the country, that possibility seems very distant. Owing to its absence, pre-pubescent boys, who are too eager to satisfy their sexual curiosity, get exposed to pornography. If pornography is the main source of information regarding sex, its impact on impressionable minds can be quite harmful. Boys will grow up thinking of women as sex objects. Thus guardians have the responsibility to help boys develop a healthy perspective towards sex.

When the rugged "tough guy" traits become the definition of what a real man should be, it becomes self-destructive. In contrast, there are men who have broken free from these rigid perimeters of traditional masculinity, who are not supporters of female oppression, bullying or violence, but are feminists themselves and are not afraid to reveal their suppressed emotions. It seems like we keep forgetting that boys are not innately predatory but are made to be so. In order to change that, we must address the problem at the elementary level by radically changing the way young boys are brought up in the first place.

Iqra L. Qamari is a student of economics at North South University and is an intern at *The Daily Star*.

Make them eat their mangoes



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

YOU left a restaurant, content, so much so that you tipped the waiter heavier than your usual. Two days later, a news flash on the TV scroll: "Sona Dana Khana Pina Restora fined Tk 1 lakh for freezing rotten fish and expired chicken."

Nausea overtakes you. To an immaculately attired waiter, you had ordered *vetki dopiaza* and *chicken jhaal farazi*. You wipe your lips to check if there are any remnants.

Your mother was admitted to a topnotch hospital last week. She is now recuperating at home, so happy, but continuing with tablets and capsules supplied by Guaranteed (to get well) Hospital. That very hospital that defines modern health facilities and even advertises imported smiling doctors with a side pose, arms folded, has now been caught with outdated medicines. You subconsciously cry out, "Ammma..." The hospital owners were not beaten up, but were slapped with a Tk 2 lakh penalty.

Television news coverage shows a video with background audio narrating the demise of 15 maunds of contaminated mangoes. Ali Fazlee with cameraperson Gopal Bhog reported that the mangoes were squashed by a roller that was indeed too big for the job. You glance at the two small mangoes remaining on your dining table. You bought them a week ago.

In addition to the monetary penalty, the Sona-Dana-making restaurant owner, his astute manager, chef, cooks, and waiters should have been made to sit at their table. Guests present should have served them chicken (old) spicy and fishy Russian roulette till they vomited on the floor. Such restaurants must be closed for good and the operators banned from doing similar businesses for 10 years. We are talking of life or death here.

Consequent to the cash fine, parents and *neekot* family members of the hospital businesspeople and the medical staff of the reputed commercial enterprise should have been forcibly admitted to chee-chee-you. There, irrespective of their diagnoses, each of them should be administered with the outdated medicine thrice a day live on



A farmer sprays mangoes with pesticides in Rajshahi defying a ban. A High Court order was issued to deploy police in the area to prevent the harmful practice.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

television. The idea here is, two can play the game. If hospitals can try to kill the paying public, hospital shareholders should be made to taste their own medicine. Such hospitals must be closed for good and the operators banned from doing similar business for 10 years. We are talking of life or death here.

Mangoes are the love of our children. Fazlee, Gopalbogh, Himsagar, Lyangra... you name it—the delicacies are the toast of any Bengali summer. Those greedy and selfish merchandisers and their top-level employees, who medicated the fruit to ripen them early and delay their decay, should be asked to call their children. Before the big roller moves, which accounts for their economic loss, their children should be made to eat those poisoned mangoes. If they want to save their children, they must save ours. Hammurabi's dictum, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a

tooth", must be practised to the fullest. Such traders must be banned from doing similar business for 10 years. We are talking of life or death here.

We have today stooped to such an abysmal state that a food recipe may sound like this. *Do not try this at home.*

Step 1: Turn on your outdated gas cylinder. Lightly fry soybean oil, flour, flavoured matching paint (that's *ghee*), sprinkle some grounded brick dust (that'll be turmeric), shreds of bark from a mature tree (forget the dog's liquid legacy, call that ginger) and a sliced stem of *Rajanigandha* flower (onion anybody?), add stone granules (salt).

Step 2: You would already have thawed expired cow meat (frozen) so that no one can smell authenticity, and prepared dicey diced pieces. Don't worry about the "best before" date; it is any date after human consumption.

Moreover, a cow has to expire before it can be eaten. But, if you really care for your health, wash the slightly odorous meat with WASA water that looks like an orange drink. Think not twice because the chairman has guaranteed its purity, saying WASA's (coloured) water was "cent

percent drinkable". Save the water because you will need it for completing the dish.

Step 3: Add the meat to the pan of hot spices. Stir to make it smell more. Add tomatoes ripened by a red chemical solution. Stir for three minutes till everything turns light brown. Boom! The cylinder too has expired.

There have been calls for capital punishment, no less, for food adulterers, notably from the Awami League presidium member and spokesperson of 14-party alliance Mohammed Nasim and RAB Director-General Benazir Ahmed.

At an *iftar* gathering (food contamination could not be ruled out even here), Mohammed Nasim said, "Those who push the countrymen to death by adulterating food are enemies of the country as well as the nation. Capital punishment should be executed against them." (*Dhaka Tribune*, May 20)

Benazir Ahmed, at a discussion on keeping the price of daily necessities stable during Ramadan at the Dhaka North City Corporation, sought amendment to the Food Safety Act-2013, and requested to incorporate capital punishment, terming the food adulterer as a "murderer". (*Daily Sun*, May 7)

They have perhaps expressed the sentiment of the suffering public, who seemingly have nowhere to go, except in helplessness and trepidation to the doctor, hospital, pharmacy, and, more unfortunately, to the quack doctors. Their lives and those of their children are pawns in this deadly game of our need and their greed.

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

QUOTABLE Quote

JRR TOLKIEN
(1892–1973)

English writer, poet, philologist, and academic

Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Resume listing
- 5 Cube face
- 11 Infamous czar
- 12 Like some sweaters
- 13 Letters
- 14 Talked crazily
- 15 Suffering
- 16 Wife of Zeus
- 17 Snowy bird
- 19 Feeding-time need
- 22 Fizzy drinks
- 24 Use the rink
- 26 Penniless
- 27 Flock females
- 28 Sky colour
- 30 Ship steers
- 31 Tennis need
- 32 Form

DOWN

- 1 Music's Hendrix
- 2 Track shape
- 3 Rescued from ruin
- 4 NBC show since 1975
- 5 Bender
- 6 Gallon quartet
- 7 Radius partner
- 8 PC key
- 9 Sturgeon eggs
- 10 Cut off
- 16 Day pts.
- 18 Teri of "Young Frankenstein"
- 19 Reprimanded
- 20 Article
- 21 Porgy's love
- 22 Reach across
- 23 Percolate
- 25 Maintain
- 29 Houdini feat
- 30 Suffered from
- 33 Put a spell on
- 34 Steel ingredient
- 36 Wee bit
- 37 Stratagem
- 38 -- Aviv
- 39 Colour
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- 41 Notes after mis

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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C I N C A D A S I N K
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