

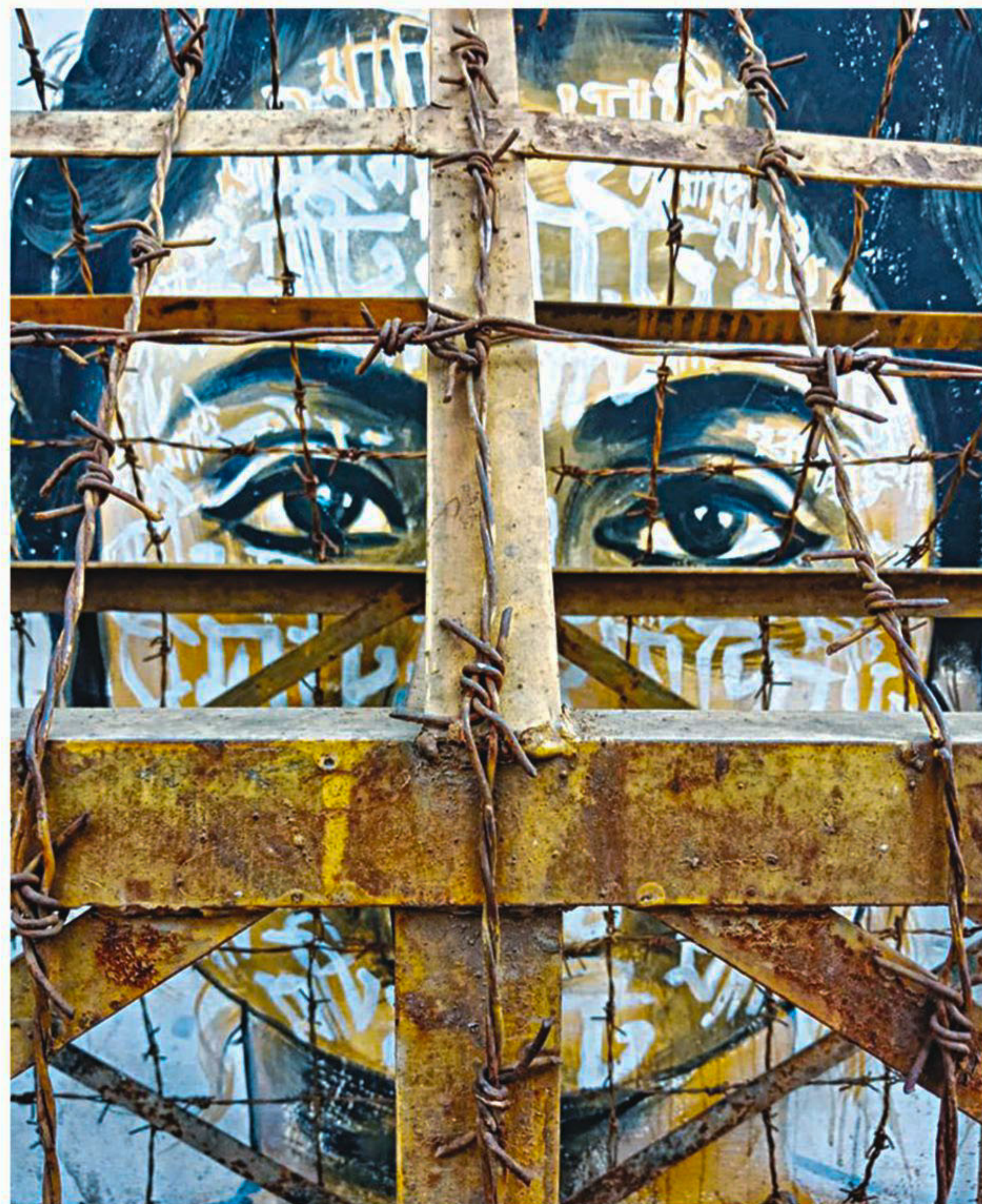
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When we hear Aklima or Lipi Khala's story, it's easy to offer our condolences from a distance. But such consequences of colourism are not only limited to rural households, where we perceive parochial notions are *more* omnipresent than our urban circles in Dhaka city. Here too, the fascination with Whiteness inextricably reflects a crude desire to emulate Western beauty standards, which in a way parallels our urbanisation efforts to mirror Western economic development.

A "modern" woman, in the social sense that she spoke fluent English, wore flamboyant, western clothing, told a *ghotok* (matchmaker) I interviewed in Dhaka that she would prefer if the bride for her son was fair-skinned, because she too, was fair-skinned. She hopes that her daughter-in-law will be like her—mistaken as a "foreigner," for being light-skinned *and* light-haired.

In many aspects of our society, we have placed and preserved the pedestal our historical colonisers unjustly solidified for themselves when they arrived in the subcontinent. Like most, I grew up digesting the misplaced conflation that fluency in English represents one's smartness, wearing western clothes affirms one's modernity, watching American television and following American politics demonstrates your intellectuality and progressiveness, and looking more like White people dictates the enviable magnitude of one's beauty. The last one is the catch here—the "foreign" we aspire to be precludes Asians, Hispanics, Middle Easterners, and especially Africans, who are commonly darker than us. But there's a main idea behind all such correlations—a universal architecture of class, assembled

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from the millstones of white supremacy.

The internalised dimension of racism the White colonialists first injected still lives on today, in every part of the world, functioning like a poison within communities of colour, where the lessons of colour biases for most individuals begin, unfortunately, at their own doorstep. But what continues to sustain this unfair dynamic?

The answer isn't streamlined, but it's most starkly decipherable in Hollywood and Bollywood—the two powerhouses that have consolidated the hegemony of colourism, a term that was coined first in 1983 by activist and author Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. The term by definition means "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour." In Hollywood, you can see that Beyoncé, Rihanna, Zendaya—who garner more appraisal for their "beauty"—are generally lighter-skinned than other African Americans. About a month ago, the *Times of India* published a collage of 30 headshots from Miss India Femina East 2019, and the contestants all resembled Bollywood sensation Katrina Kaif's whiter end of the brown skin.

Time after time, Bollywood has cultivated the obsession with Whiteness: popular, critically acclaimed director Imtiaz Ali cast newcomer Nargis Fakhri—white skinned, of Pakistani and Czech heritage—in a leading role in *Rockstar*. For an industry criticised for its nepotism, and lack of access for ordinary Indian citizens, it's unbelievably nonsensical that directors cannot find a girl in Mumbai who can do justice to these roles. And when you realise that the

White women's voices were dubbed for their lack of fluency in Hindi, there is no option left but to confirm the exhibition of racism, by not just the director, but also the audience the filmmaker aims to attract.

To clarify—the problem here is not that the fair individuals are given more opportunities, but rather that those with dark complexions cannot find positions in the entertainment and advertising industry, and are less likely to be married, but more likely to experience racial discrimination, sexual violence, and all such widespread machinations of victimisation in society. The reason? Internalised racism adds another layer of marginalisation for the socially vulnerable, which is why those who have insidious experiences like that of Aklima and Lipi Khala's are mostly underprivileged women.

It's not just the marriage market, it's not just the rural or privileged class, it's not just the entertainment industry, because it's all of it; colourism and internalised racism is ingrained and entrenched everywhere. So, when we learn about the dark-skinned dowry that exploited Aklima and Lipi Khala, we need to recognise first that it's a problem, and internalise that these biases we've validated are harmful. Only then we can hope to break the vicious cycle of white supremacy, because it's a social menace that begins with individual mindsets, but it's also one where the end starts at self-reflection, or rather self-confrontation of preconceived wrong ideals.

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