

STAR WEEKEND

in other news...

AUGUST 23, 2019



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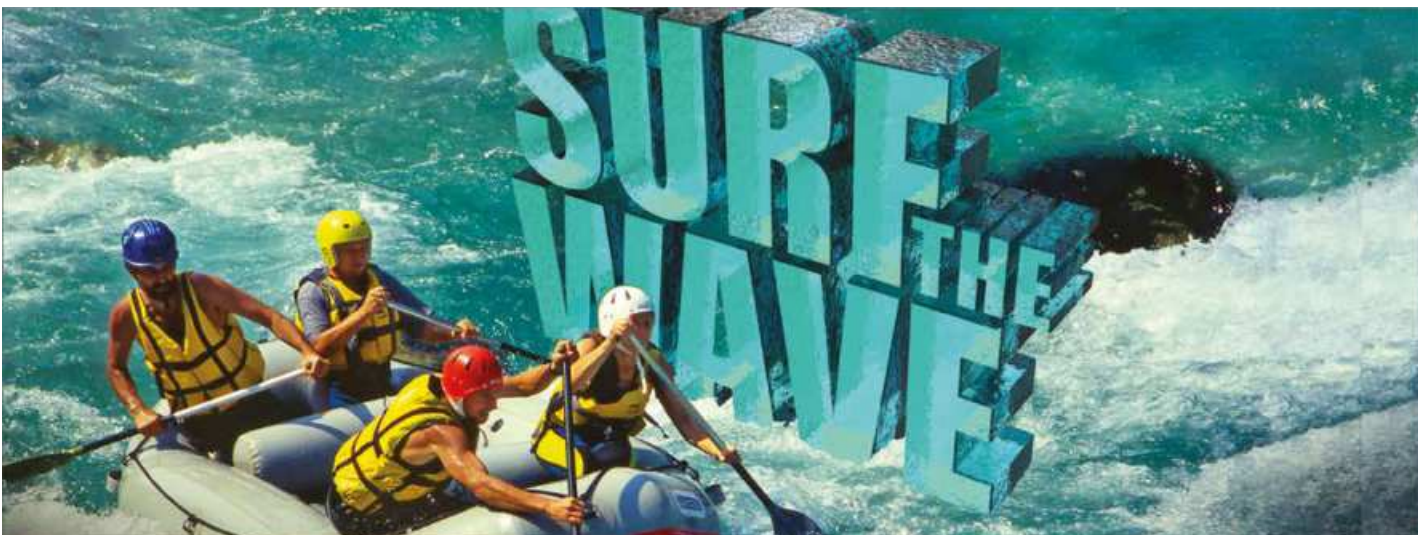
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*If you wanna fly, you got to give up
the shit that weighs you down.*

— Toni Morrison

SNAPSHOT
BY TANJILA MUNIA

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Low rawhide prices this Eid

The price of rawhide has fallen sharply, a growing concern for small traders for whom Eid-ul-Azha is a major point of the year. Rawhides were traded at very low prices in Dhaka's Hazaribagh, one of the country's major tannery hubs, though prices were to remain unchanged this year, as per a government decision.

Small traders allege, in media reports, that they individually bought hides from across the city and aren't even getting the price they paid to buy the hides. Prices from last year have fallen at least twofold for both goat and cowhide—which is not just unfortunate but unexpected.

The shifting of tanneries from Hazaribagh to Savar has made local and foreign buyers reluctant to purchase rawhide. The majority of the tanneries have not yet been able to start operations because of a lack of gas connection and incomplete factory structures. The government and tannery owners are blaming each other for these issues.

Leather is one of the highest export earning sectors after apparel—we must uncover the reasons behind this price fall and save this business.

Md. Zillur Rahaman
Gandaria, Dhaka

Fighting the dengue menace

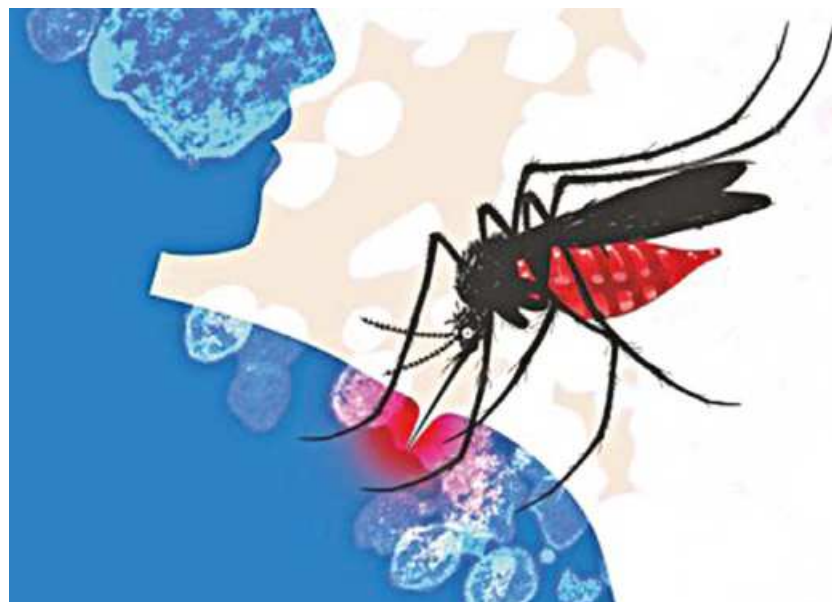
The residents of Dhaka city are suffering the most from the dengue menace despite DNCC and DSCC having a large budget for controlling the reproduction of mosquitoes.

Though people don't always comply with waste management, the authorities concerned are more responsible for this dengue outbreak. Irresponsible activities of the authorities accelerate the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes and our safety matters little to them. They don't carry out door-to-door inspections, run

comprehensive awareness programmes, or enforce punitive measures for violating laws.

Measures for larvae destruction, awareness programmes with community involvement and insecticide spray campaigns can bring this problem under control. But these measures must be continued to some extent throughout the year, not just during a crisis.

Samia Jahan
Rajbari Govt. College, Rajbari



When it no longer pays to pollute the environment

ZYMAISLAM

Just as the city corporations were about to lay down the shovels and pat themselves on the back for a job well done cleaning up all the qurbani waste, more appeared on the streets. Traders threw away reeking piles of hides, dumping them in public garbage spots (also known as sidewalks). The rawhide merchants' association surmised that around Tk 100 crore worth of hides had to be thrown away during this Eid.

Since the main message of this festival is to teach the value of an animal's life, most practitioners take care not to waste even a single body part. All that can be consumed for sustenance, is done so, while the hooves and horns are ground into bone meal for fertilisers and poultry feed. The hides feed the second largest export industry of the country i.e. leather and leather goods.

So seeing rawhides lying on the side of the roads, waiting to be picked up by garbage collectors, was not only shocking because it was wasteful, but it was also a grotesque real-life representation of the state of the economy.

Rawhide merchants say they threw away the hides because the tanners had not paid them for supplying hides since last year, and were asking to buy on credit again. Tanners say that they are not being able to pay because business has not been doing well. Ask them both why the situation has come to this, and they will all point towards the Savar tannery estate's effluent treatment plant.

The whole tannery district of Hazaribagh was moved to Savar in 2017, where a tannery estate was developed centering a Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP). The plant was supposed to finally transport the environmentally damaging industry to the world of basic compliance.

"We invested so much money in relocating from Hazaribagh only to find that the effluent treatment plant is not functioning. On one hand, we are still not compliant and so we cannot attract new businesses, and on the other hand, we have spent a large chunk of money to relocate and expand," says Ali Hossain, the managing director of Paramount Leather.

Hossain's predicament is interesting



Rawhides lying in waste.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

because he owns both a tannery and a rawhide trading business. He has his feet in both boats—the one that cannot buy rawhide because it cannot pay its dues, and the one not being able to sell because its buyers are broke.

"I had to reinvest a lot of money during the relocation to Savar. Most of the investments went into buying new capital machinery, because the ones in the Hazaribagh factory were so old, I could not move them without them falling apart," states Hossain.

Hossain was hoping to attract new business to make up for the costs of moving, but without the CETP being functional, that is not happening. "Most of our business is with China, because the other countries want environmentally compliant businesses. Even Korea refuses to take leather from us. But ever since China's business scenario deteriorated, we have been suffering," he claims.

He is referring, of course, to the United States-China trade war. China imports tanned leather sheets from Bangladesh for their leather-goods making industry. As leather products from China are being blockaded by the US, their demand for the raw material too fell, tanners claim.

Leather Mag stated in a report that tanned

leather exports fell by 6.42 percent during the last fiscal year.

Tanners say that they are not being able to attract brands who purchase finished leather goods, because our leather is not compliant and that most of the brands are choosing Kolkata, because their tanneries are not environmentally damaging.

Two years ago, Bay Group had a new Taiwanese business partner in anticipation of all the business that relocating to Savar's tannery estate would bring. The company, Tai Chong, helped Bay set up state-of-the-art machinery in their factory. Upon entering, the first thing one would notice was the distinct lack of stink that is so characteristic of tanneries in Bangladesh. That shiny, clean factory was abuzz with foreign-educated, English-speaking millennials, who moved their lives to that dystopian industrial zone of Savar to make a quick buck. But when the CETP failed to be fully compliant a year after relocation, Tai Chong packed up and left.

"They left around September of last year," says Ziaur Rahman, managing director of Bay Group. "This was a big hit for the image of the country."

Continued to page 4



Rawhide merchants say they threw away the hides because the tanners had not paid them for supplying hides since last year, and were asking to buy on credit again.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

"MY HOME IS AS GREAT AS THE PADMA BRIDGE TO ME"

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Workers are applying salt to rawhide to preserve it until sold, at Chawkbazar area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

After page 3

Rahman claims that they wanted to set up their own effluent treatment plant within the factory, but that government—Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) to be exact—is not giving clearance. “We have the capacity to build our own internal plant. This would also be beneficial for the central plant, because we would not be pressurising it with our waste load, but there has been no progress regarding that. We even set up a laboratory to test the components of the effluent we release,” says Rahman.

Because of compliance issues, big companies like Bay and Apex are choosing to import leather sheets from compliant sources. That way the factories are at least able to get contracts for finished goods. “I need to be able to pay my staff during these times,” says Rahman.

Foreign contracts are needed because the domestic demand is not enough—a 2015 conference presentation by Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh

for Policy Dialogue, in a recent roundtable discussion organised at *The Daily Star*.

Why is environmental damage still happening?

“At present, the construction and functionality of the CETP has edged towards completion, but the Chrome Recovery Unit and Sludge Treatment Plant will require further work before they are fully functional,” states a policy brief by Research and Policy Integration for Development. The think-tank undertook a situational study sponsored by The Asia Foundation.

Currently 123 factories are operating inside the tannery estate, with 18 more being built.

“The CETP is not running at its fullest efficiency as some of the facilities are yet to be installed. Dewatering tanks, sludge thickening, and sludge recycling processes are not installed yet. As a result, sludges are [sic] now dumped into the dumping yard, which is likely to be filled up before the end of 2019. It thus reinforces the need for a sludge recycling system,” states the think-tank report.

That is basically the crux of it. Dr Delwar Hossain, professor at the department of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology explains the details.

First up, he talks about the solid waste dilemma. “We have yet to decide how to make use of the sludge produced by the factories, so they are being stored in a plot in the estate,” explains Dr Hossain. Sludge, the solid waste produced by the tanneries, are usually of three types—solid waste produced while trimming the raw hides (e.g. ears and fur), chromium treated tanned leather trimmings, and the remainders of the CETP-treated effluent water. For two months following Eid-ul-Adha, the daily solid waste production is 150-200 tonnes. Usually it is 80-100 tonnes.

“We accepted a proposal for three separate dumping zones just this week,” says Dr Hossain.

Initially the waste was supposed to be used to generate power. “We were supposed to have a sludge power generation system, but BUET experts refused to pass the proposals, because their designs were not proper. Such a system is very much feasible, but when we refused to accept the designs, the authorities backed away,” adds

Dr Hossain.

They are looking into other avenues. Two companies have also been given permission to collect the bio-waste and produce gelatin, and they were supposed to go into production on July 1, but have not done so yet, informs Dr Hossain.

There is also a skirmish going on regarding allocation of tannery estate land for factories producing by-products. “The tannery owners are refusing to have any companies in their estate except tanneries even though such a company is necessary for their survival. The company is now on its way to get space outside the estate.”

The dewatering house not being completed yet is also an issue, says Dr Hossain. “The sludge going to the dumping yard 95 percent water, and the run-off from this waste is mixing with the river.”

There is more. “All tanneries are supposed to have two lines—one is supposed to let out normal effluent, and the other is supposed to let out chromium effluent. But not all the tanneries maintain this distinction. Out of 121 factories, 62 are compliant regarding this. The others aren’t.”

There was also a period of a few months around two months back, when the Chinese contractor in charge of the CETP did not separate chromium from the effluent and were dumping directly, claims Dr Hossain.

For the first year, after the relocation of the factories, only two units out of four of the CETP were functional, leading to a High Court battle with environmentalists. The CETP was finally made fully operational in the middle of last year.

There is currently also no way to deal with the salinity of the water being piped into the Dhaleswari river. Dr Hossain found that there are 2,500-3,000 milligrams of dissolved solids (like salt) in the effluent being released. “This is more than the limit allowed by the Environment Conservation Rules 1997.” Once this effluent goes into the water, they

“We need further investment of Tk 500 crores to build the infrastructure for tackling this. We need to build a unit that can perform reverse osmosis,” he states.

For years, all parties have been after the leather industry for completely ruining the environment in Hazaribagh. Now that they have realised that they need to clean up their act, why can’t the government?



Rawhides lying on the side of the road, waiting to be picked up. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

stated that only 15-18 percent of the total leather supply can fulfill the domestic demand.

“It is very unfortunate that Bangladesh imports USD 1 billion worth of leather every year while the country has unused rawhide,” said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre

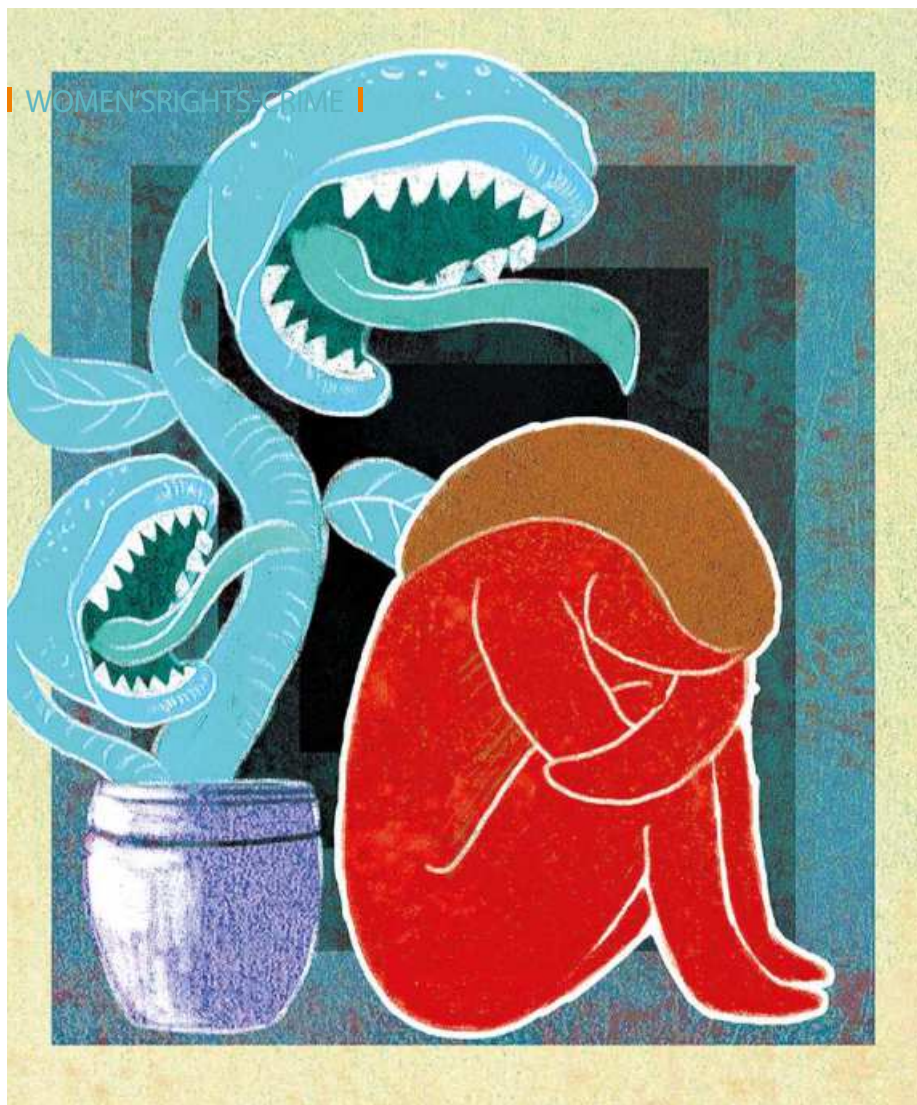


ILLUSTRATION: NAHFIA JAHAN MONNI

and needed up to Tk 10 lakhs as a bribe to secure it. Helena, in good faith, says she then gave her lifetime savings, nearly Tk 1 lakh, and took a loan of Tk 2.5 lakh from a rural development NGO, which Jasim said he would repay once he started his job.

Tara Miah also took a loan of Tk 1,50,000 from her paternal aunt back home and told Helena's other relatives that she had gotten married to Jasim and took money from them in the name of giving gifts to the new bridegroom.

The abuse

The most devastating things happened next. According to Helena, one day Jasim asked her to go with Tara Miah as they were going to marry at a Kazi office. Helena went with him in good faith. But instead of going to the Kazi office, he took her to a house where she says he attempted to rape her.

"I never imagined that that man could do this to me. Not only this but he had told me that he was someone else and wanted to marry me. Since I didn't agree, he threatened me saying that he would release the nude photos and videos he had taken and he wouldn't repay my loans. He beat me severely and then took my signature on a piece of paper," she says.

Helena says she wanted to leave him but Tara Miah continued to blackmail her and didn't allow her to go back to her village or share the events with relatives or

and her husband Tara Miah rented a room worth Tk 3,000 in the middle of last September. "As far as I know, the man was unemployed and he came every month when Helena would get her salary. We would find Helena crying all night and the other tenants could not sleep well for her crying. We asked her several times but she wouldn't share anything with us. Later, like the other tenants, I assumed that her husband had married another woman," she says.

Sultana also mentions that Helena wouldn't cook, take showers, or ever smile. "I sometimes gave her food. At the end of last month, she became extremely sick and unable to attend work. I called her husband to take her, but he refused to do so. Later, finding no other solution, I called her younger brother, who took her home," she adds.

Pursuing a legal battle—nearly impossible for the poor

Helena's relatives have finally been able to file a case against Tara Miah in Rangpur judge court. According to Helena's paternal uncle Wahed Ali, the police of Pirgachha thana in Rangpur was reluctant to take her case, as the events in question occurred in Gazipur. "But it is impossible for us to deal with a case in Gazipur, as I need to take care of Helena at the same time. Her younger sisters' in-laws are not allowing them to visit her," he says.

Star Weekend contacted Pirgachha thana OC Md Rezaul Karim about Tara Miah's recent threats towards Helena. He said, "If there is any issue of threats in my area, only then can we take the case."

Tara Miah had previously offered Tk 1.5 lakhs, through relatives, to 'settle' the matter. Otherwise, he threatens to release Helena's photographs and videos. Star Weekend could not get in touch with Tara Miah, because he and his family members went on hiding. Since then, his number is also switched off.

However, we have listened to a phone recording provided by Helena. Tara had called her phone, and she recorded the conversation. "You told everything to your uncle. I will see what you can do now. Do whatever you want, I don't have any problem. I thought since I have married you, I won't show those (images and videos) to anyone. But now I think I don't have any option," the recording states.

According to Wahed Ali, law enforcers as well as legal aid offices, seemed hesitant about taking the case because they are suspicious as to why Helena gave such a large amount of money to Tara Miah or why she kept silent for years. But according to Helena and her close friends and relatives, she was suffering from depression for years while struggling to support her family and enduring blackmail. She says she could not have spoken up.

"My confidence as an educated independent woman evaporated and I was so depressed that I wasn't in a state to get out. Sometimes, I thought I would take my own life but I ultimately couldn't. But now, I truly want to get out of it. I kept silent for years because I feared for my dignity and money, which has already been destroyed. Now, I want justice for the nightmares that happened to me," Helena says from her sickbed.

Additional Reporting done by Kongkon Karmaker, Dinajpur Correspondent of The Daily Star.

According to Helena, one day Jasim asked her to go with Tara Miah as they were going to marry at a Kazi office. Helena went with him in good faith. But instead of going to the Kazi office, he took her to a house where she says he attempted to rape her.

friends.

"I was so helpless that I started a job in the quality section of Tanaz Fashion garments in Tongi. Tara Miah would come from Rangpur when I got my salary, take all the money from me and give only around Tk 200-300 for my food for the whole month. I protested but he would beat me severely and blackmail me with the photos and videos. At one point, I became so sick that I could not get up from the bed and had to leave my job," she adds.

Star Weekend contacted Sultana Begum, the caretaker of the house where Helena was staying. According to Sultana, Helena

NILIMAJAHAN

28-year-old Helena Akter, from Pirgachha, Rangpur, is currently battling for her life due to pulmonary tuberculosis, psychological trauma, and other health complications. According to her relatives, doctors of Rangpur Medical College Hospital even recommended that her relatives take her home as her TB is infectious and the hospital authorities say that it may spread to other patients.

This all happened as a result of the alleged constant physical and mental abuse she endured for the past year and a half from a neighbour Md Tara Miah, whom she used to call *uncle*. According to Helena, he forcefully married her by hatching a plot—seducing her over the phone under another identity, filming intimate moments, and then threatening to upload these clips online if he wasn't given money. This way, Tara Miah extorted around Tk 8,00, 000 from Helena in the past two years. Her younger brother rescued her from a house in Gazipur at the beginning of this month, after which she was taken to the hospital in her home district of Rangpur.

Helena's story could have been different. She was an independent working woman who lost her mother when she was five and then her father at 13. Inevitably, the responsibility of her three siblings fell on her and despite the lack of financial and family support, she continued her studies and moved to Dhaka in 2013 to complete her masters in Islamic History and Culture at Eden College. According to

her younger sister Hena, after completing her masters, Helena was finding it difficult to land a job. "She would manage money for our food and schooling by doing part-time jobs in different event management companies. Later, in 2017, she managed a full-time job with a meagre salary (around Tk 10,000) as a field officer of a microcredit organisation in Gazipur," she says. Despite her hardships, she arranged and paid for the weddings of her two younger sisters. "Now, it was her turn. Our relatives were searching for a suitable bridegroom," she adds.

The plot

According to Helena, Md Tara Miah claimed he had found Jasim Uddin, a potential groom for her. Helena was interested and asked him to proceed. "Acting as Jasim, Tara Miah spoke with me on the phone. I couldn't imagine that he would trick me like that. All I knew was that I fell in love with the man on the other end of the phone," she says.

Helena claims that a few days later the man told her that he needed to complete a course for his job, for which he needed Tk 10,000 monthly, and asked for it from her. "Since I was hoping to marry him, I didn't think twice about investing in his future and paid Tk 1,20,000 from my salary over one year through Tara Miah."

Jasim never wanted to meet her in person though and always made excuses when Helena asked to meet him. She was convinced that he was busy with his studies and preparation for jobs. A few days later, Jasim told Helena that he had an offer for a job as a police sub-inspector



Women shout slogans during a protest in Srinagar, August 14.

PHOTO: DANISH ISMAIL/REUTERS

Articles 370 and 35A, explained

SADAM HUSSAIN
SALIK BASHARAT

On Monday, August 5, 2019, the people of Jammu and Kashmir lost all contact with the outside world. After clamping down on the internet and telephone lines for the 53rd time this year, deploying tens of thousands of troops in what is already one of the most militarised places on earth, shutting down all educational institutes, cancelling a major Hindu pilgrimage, evacuating tourists, arresting hundreds of local politicians and imposing Section 144—the BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party) led Government of India made historic changes to their constitutional relations with the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Since Kashmir's accession to the Union of India in October 1947, the Indian State has actively tried to obliterate the autonomy of the region by taking away its special privileges which were once vested to it by the Indian Constitution through Article 370 and Article 35A. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, which was passed by the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House), and the recent abrogation of Article 370, have erased the special status between Kashmir and the Indian State. Now, legally, constitutionally, and psychologically, the Indian State is oppressing 12.5 million people by depriving them of rights as basic as communication with family within and outside Kashmir, access to food and medicine, imposing curfew, alongside depriving the Kashmiris of their right to dissent, and the larger claim over their distinct legal status. This step comes with an unprecedented degradation of the state status that Jammu and Kashmir held to that of a Union Territory administered directly by the Central Government.

What are Article 370 and Article 35A? Why were they important?

Article 370, according to ex-Home Minister GL Nanda, was “the only avenue

of taking the Constitution into Jammu and Kashmir”. Article 370 allowed the people of Jammu and Kashmir a certain degree of autonomy and was the cornerstone of their accession to India when formerly they had the choice of joining either India or Pakistan after their independence from British Rule in 1947.

Article 370 allowed the people of Kashmir the freedom to form their own constitution and laws. The Indian State was handed control of only the finance, defence, foreign affairs and communications for the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

At the same time, Article 35A allowed the local legislature of Jammu and Kashmir to define who the permanent residents of the region are and also forbade those not considered as permanent residents from permanently settling, purchasing immovable property, seeking employment under the state government or winning scholarships or financial aids in Jammu and Kashmir.

Both these articles guaranteed a certain degree of autonomy to the people of Jammu and Kashmir who were also promised aplebiscite by Jawaharlal Nehru. **What does the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 say?** The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act essentially reorganises the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories: 1. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and 2. The Union Territory of Ladakh.

In accordance with the J&K Reorganisation Act, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have its own Legislative Assembly consisting of 107 seats of which 24 will remain vacant for representatives from areas of Jammu and Kashmir under the control of the Pakistani Government. The Union Territory of Ladakh, on the other hand,

will not have a legislative assembly. Both the newly formed Union Territories will be administered by the President of India through an administrator, appointed by the President, known as the Lieutenant Governor.

As for legislative authority, the Legislative Assembly of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir can formulate laws which are “related to: (i) any matters specified in the State List of the Constitution, except “Police” and “Public Order”, and (ii) any matter in the Concurrent List applicable to Union Territories. Further, Parliament will have the power to make laws in relation to any matter for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.”

Further, this new act repeals 153 existing state laws of Jammu and Kashmir and introduces 106 new central laws that were previously not applicable. These newly introduced central laws include the Aadhaar Act, 2016, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, etc. By rendering Article 35A ineffective, the J&K Reorganisation Act also allows for residents from all over India to purchase land in Kashmir and involve themselves in the local businesses.

All of these changes were made without the consent of the people of Kashmir. How?

Unlike the Central government's claims, Kashmir continues to be under siege with people, irrespective of class or other social standings, being unable to contact their family within and outside Kashmir over



A man with pellet injuries is treated inside a house in a neighbourhood where there have been regular clashes with Indian security forces, in Srinagar, August 14.

PHOTO: DANISH ISMAIL/REUTERS

the telephone, internet and other means of communication.

Moreover, the process of deployment of additional ‘security’ forces which started in the latter half of July this year has intensified with reports being released claiming the number to have increased from 7,00,000 to a million.

Many scholars, jurists and historians, post the introduction of the bill in the Parliament, have claimed this step to be unconstitutional on the ground that Article 370 served as the means for Article 1 (being a part of the Indian Union) to be implemented in Kashmir. Hence, legally freeing Kashmir from the Union, a claim that the current state has been constantly trying to suppress. Alongside, what this step appears to have done is overlook the bloody past of Kashmir, be it as early as 1990s or later rejuvenations of the movement in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2018 and now in 2019.

With an unknown number of people detained, injured, and killed, the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and particularly Kashmir stays in a limbo, making the largest democracy appear to be the Orwellian State.



Kashmiri boys cycle in an empty street during restrictions in Srinagar, August 14.

PHOTO: DANISH SIDDIQUI/REUTERS



People from various parts of India wait at a bus terminal during restrictions as they wait to leave Srinagar.

PHOTO: DANISH ISMAIL/REUTERS

Travelling and collecting personal testimonies from Kashmiri civilians, a team of economists and activists offer a glimpse into the silenced streets of Srinagar and neighbouring villages. The report was made public on August 13, 2019.

We spent five days (August 9-13, 2019) traveling extensively in Kashmir. Our visit began on August 9, 2019—four days after the Indian government abrogated Articles 370 and 35A, dissolved the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated it into two Union Territories.

When we arrived in Srinagar on August 9, we found the city silenced and desolated by curfew, and bristling

We spent five days moving around and talking to hundreds of ordinary people in Srinagar city, as well as villages and small towns of Kashmir. We spoke to women, school and college students, shopkeepers, journalists, people who run small businesses, daily wage labourers, workers and migrants from UP, West Bengal and other states. We spoke to Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs who live in the Valley, as well as Kashmiri Muslims.

Everywhere, we were cordially received, even by people who were very angry about the situation or sceptical of our purpose. Even as people expressed their pain, anger, and sense of betrayal against

return to normalcy in Kashmir are grossly misleading. They are based on selective reports from a small enclave in the centre of Srinagar. As things stand, there is no space in Kashmir for any sort of protest, however peaceful.

Reactions to the Government's Treatment of J&K:

When our flight landed, and the airlines staff announced that passengers could switch on our mobiles, the entire flight (with mostly Kashmiris in it) burst into mocking laughter. "What a joke," we could hear people say—since mobile and landline phones and internet have all been blocked since August 5!

The words we heard over and over from people about the Government decisions on J&K were 'zulm' (oppression), 'zyadti' (excess/cruelty), and 'dhokha' (betrayal). As one man in Safakadal (downtown Srinagar) put it, "The Government has treated us Kashmiris like slaves, taking decisions

Kashmir Caged!

JEAN DRÈZE, KAVITA KRISHNAN,
MAIMOONA MOLLA, AND VIMAL BHAI



Kashmiri residents leave their house during restrictions in Srinagar, August 14.

PHOTO: REUTERS/DANISH SIDDIQUI



A pellet victim in Srinagar's SMHS hospital.

PHOTO: FACT-FINDING TEAM

with Indian military and paramilitary presence. The curfew was total, as it had been since August 5. The streets of Srinagar were empty and all institutions and establishments were closed (shops, schools, libraries, petrol pumps, government offices, banks). Only some ATMs and chemists' shops—and all police stations—were open. People were moving about in ones and twos here and there, but not in groups.

We travelled widely, inside and outside Srinagar—far beyond the small enclave (in the centre of Srinagar) where the Indian media operates. In that small enclave, a semblance of normalcy returns from time to time, and this has enabled the Indian media to claim that life in Kashmir is back to normal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

the Government of India, they extended warmth and unstinting hospitality to us. We are deeply moved by this.

Except for the BJP spokesperson on Kashmir Affairs, we did not meet a single person who supported the Indian government's decision to abrogate Article 370. On the contrary, most people were extremely angry, both at the abrogation of Article 370 (and 35A) and at the manner in which it had been done.

Anger and fear were the dominant emotions we encountered everywhere. People expressed their anger freely in informal conversation, but no one was willing to speak on camera. Anyone who speaks up is at risk of persecution from the government.

The Indian media's claims of a rapid

about our lives and our future while we are captive. It's like forcing something down our throats while keeping us bound and gagged, with a gun to our heads."

In every lane of Srinagar city, every town, every village, that we visited, we received an extensive schooling from ordinary people, including school kids, on the history of the Kashmir dispute. They were angry and appalled at the manner in which the Indian media was whitewashing this history. Many said: "Article 370 was the contract between Kashmir's leadership and India's. Had that contract not been signed, Kashmir would never have acceded to India. With Article 370 gone, India no longer has any basis for its claim over Kashmir."

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Repatriation of the ROHINGYAS

All an eye-wash

Since November 2018, around a million Rohingya refugees living in 34 extremely congested camps located in the Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas of Cox's Bazar district, have been living under the ultimatum of repatriation. These Rohingyas, most of whom fled their homes in Myanmar facing genocide and atrocities in 2017, consider this ultimatum as their death sentence. Their collective memory is so bound up with the massacres that took place just two years ago that they still cannot think about going back to Myanmar. Repeated demonstrations throughout November 2018 by the Rohingyas against the repatriation programme foiled the first attempt of repatriation since the recent influx. Nevertheless, the Rohingyas got the message that many of them would soon be sent back to Myanmar under the repatriation deal signed between the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments.



| SPOTLIGHT |

When recent reports revealed that some 3,450 Rohingya refugees will be repatriated to Myanmar, panic struck the camps again. Unlike the repatriation programme of November 2018, this time the families earmarked for repatriation have not been informed yet (as of August 19, 2019). However, leaflets issued by the Myanmar government inviting Rohingyas to come back and resettle as the “residents” of Myanmar have been circulated in all the refugee camps. This publicity campaign intensified panic among Rohingyas because they started to feel that anybody from any camp can be repatriated come August 22.

On August 18, when we first visited camp number 26 also known as Noapara camp in Teknaf, the panic-stricken residents surrounded us and shouted at us, “We don’t want to return. We will be slaughtered. Down with repatriation.” When we assured them that we had not come to register their names for repatriation and explained our case, they calmed down. Najir Hossain, majhi (camp head) of I-block of camp 26 came forward and said, “We have been hearing about repatriation for months. But we have not been informed about the process yet. We are extremely scared.”

Sumnera Begum, 45, broke down in tears when asked why they were so scared

properties, freedom of religion, movement and expression, release of arbitrarily imprisoned Rohingyas and release of Rohingyas from 19 detention camps in Akyab (Sittwe), capital of the Rakhine state.” He added, “We can only return if these legitimate demands of ours are met unconditionally. Otherwise, we shall not return. Even if you kill us, we will die here but will not go to Myanmar.”

Last November, the Bangladesh government faced similar resistance when they tried to start the repatriation programme. According to Rohingya leaders, when the government informed the families who would be sent back, they all fled from their shelters in the camp. Rashid Ahmed, a resident of Jamtoli camp, was listed for repatriation in 2018. According to him, he was informed by his majhi Nurul Islam that he was on the list of returnees. “When I got this news from the majhi, I instantly took the decision to flee from Jamtoli camp. I have four sons and three daughters. With all my family members, I went to Kutupalong and travelled from one to another camp. I spent 10 days like this and when I was assured that the repatriation had been cancelled, I returned to my shelter.”

Like Rashid, many families earmarked for repatriation fled from their homes last year. According to Nurul Islam, last year

informed decision about the repatriation. We believe that repatriation has to be absolutely voluntary. The remaining questions and uncertainties about repatriation is regarding what will happen on the Myanmar side of the border.”

A press statement sent by UNHCR to *Star Weekend* on August 18 could not confirm at that time from which camps the 3,450 Rohingyas would be repatriated. The RRRC office stated on August 19 that informing the enlisted Rohingyas would start from August 20 (we received word that majhis in a few camps were shown lists of the Rohingya families on August 20, the day this issue went to print). According to UNHCR, after the Bangladesh government informs the Rohingyas, UNHCR will take the following steps: “Together with the Government, UNHCR will ask these refugees to come forward and discuss the option of repatriation. UNHCR will meet those who express interest in return in a confidential setting, in order to consult them on their intentions regarding return. Those who express a wish to return will be invited for a second interview to ensure the voluntariness of their decision. They will be asked to complete a voluntary repatriation form.”

UNHCR further states, “Refugee returns must be voluntary, they need to be safe,

tell us to return to Myanmar, when they cannot ensure us of our safety?” he asked.

In fact, UNHCR also admits this serious limitation. Joseph Surja Moni Tripura, UNHCR spokesperson, told *Star Weekend*, “Current limitations on UNHCR’s access to areas of return prevents us from fully assessing the conditions of return. The security situation in these areas is a factor constraining access, which speaks directly to the current environment and conditions for return in these parts of Rakhine State.”

According to Rohingya leaders, besides security, citizenship, and recognition as a Rohingya Muslim, is a major demand that has to be fulfilled before any move of repatriation. Under the current repatriation programme, the returnees will be issued a national verification card (NVC), which according to the Myanmar government is a gateway to citizenship; however, the Rohingyas consider this to be a trap. The reason behind this distrust can be easily understood from the leaflets circulated by the Myanmar government themselves. According to the leaflet, the returnees will be treated as “residents” of Myanmar, not its citizens. Thus, NVC denies Rohingyas their right to self-identify as members of Rohingya ethnicity, even though Myanmar’s citizenship system is based on ethnicity and full rights accrue to members of an ethnic group who have been living in Myanmar before 1823.

Besides, NVC holders whose houses are not in liveable conditions (almost all of them), will have to wait in the temporary camps for the Myanmar government to rebuild their houses. The returnees will only be able to travel within their village, requiring permission to venture outside. They will also require special permission to fish in the sea which is a major livelihood for many Rohingyas living in and around Akiyab.

According to Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN), more than 120,000 Rohingyas are still living in Rakhine state, most of whom are confined in different temporary camps. Few thousands have been released over the last few years on the condition that they accept the NVC. In July 2019, BHRN published a report titled “National Verification Cards: A Barrier to Repatriation” which described in detail how these cardholders are still victims of human rights abuse with severe restrictions on education, freedom of religion, and freedom of movement. For instance, according to the report, if an NVC cardholder wants to travel, s/he has to submit a request form (“Form 4”), which is rejected in almost all cases. As a result, the NVC card holders are confined to villages or transit camps with no education and work opportunities—which seems to validate the apprehension of the Rohingya refugees.

Despite these uncertainties and questions around the current repatriation programme, the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments are fully ready to repatriate the Rohingyas. However, there is no doubt that this flawed second attempt at repatriation has been made without addressing the issues that forced the Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh in 2017 and before. Such a move will never improve the human rights condition of the Rohingya refugees.

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Recognition as a Rohingya is one of the key demands of Rohingya refugees; however, this card issued by the Bangladesh government and UNHCR address them as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals.



This leaflet, issued by the Myanmar government inviting Rohingyas back to Myanmar as “residents”, are being circulated in the camps.



The word “repatriation” reminded Rohingya refugees of horrific torture and atrocities purported by Myanmar army in 2017.

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

to return. She showed several bullet and splinter wounds in her legs and said, “I had three sons and two daughters. Two of my sons were shot from a helicopter. I was with them but could not save them. I lost my youngest son in the jungle and I could cross the border only with my two daughters. My husband is in a Myanmar prison since 2016 without any reason. They have burnt and bombed our houses. They are inviting us because they want to kill the rest of us.”

While Sumnera was crying, more and more Rohingyas gathered in the spot and started again to chant slogans against the repatriation programme. Nur Hossain, an elderly Rohingya and former headmaster of a school in Rakhine state, came out with a set of written demands and read it out. The demands included: “Full citizenship of Myanmar and recognition of ethnicity as Rohingya, safe and dignified return to own homes not to shelters or another camp, trial of the criminals who killed innocent civilians and raped women, possession of land

the listed returnees were informed five to seven days prior to their repatriation. “This time we have not been informed about the families yet. We only got leaflets describing the benefits of repatriation. We are apprehensive that the government might inform the families at the last minute so that nobody can flee from their homes as they did last time and are compelled to return to Myanmar. If this happens, this will bring disastrous consequence for us. Under the current circumstance, none of us want to return to Myanmar. I can assert that on behalf of around 10,000 residents of this camp,” he says.

Abul Kalam, Bangladesh’s refugee, relief and repatriation commissioner (RRRC) ruled out such apprehensions. “We shall ensure hundred percent voluntariness during repatriation,” he states. “We have taken all logistical and administrative preparations for the last few weeks. In the next few days, we shall inform the families. We have requested UNHCR to consult with the families and assess their voluntariness so that they can take

dignified and sustainable. UNHCR’s role in the process will be determined by whether these fundamental principles are respected. For UNHCR to have a role in facilitating returns, the conditions must be in place for voluntary, safe and dignified return and the physical, legal, and material safety of returnees. This includes UNHCR’s ability to monitor the return and reintegration of returnees.”

However, Rohingya leaders apprehend that reaching out to these families and taking informed decisions through two consecutive interviews is almost impossible in the remaining two days. A prominent Rohingya leader who requested anonymity said, “Repatriation is a welcome initiative. We want to go back. We don’t want to spend our entire life as refugees. But, under current circumstances, there cannot be any move for repatriation. Even UNHCR does not have access to most places in Rakhine state. If they repatriate us on August 22, even UNHCR will not be able to monitor our safe return and reintegration. Then, how can they

TONI MORRISON

author of many voices

On August 5, 2019, the fierce, eloquent flag-bearer of African American literature passed away at age 88.

SARAH ANJUM BARI

When I think of Toni Morrison's oeuvre, the word 'geod' comes to mind. A composite whole—each novel, each essay tightly knitted, contained by the solidity and confidence of its author's direction of ideas. You think you know what to expect, given the ubiquity of its cultural influence. But split it open, delve into the pages, and you're stunned by the polyphonic insides. Her stories and nonfiction are populated by voices, memories, by colliding experiences, all of which reveal a sparkling, thriving, labyrinthine world. Morrison devoted the five decades of her writing life into ensuring that this depiction was that of the black experience, complete with its pains and joys, its unique struggles and personalities.

Chloe Anthony Wofford (or Toni as we know her) was part of a household shaped by the socio-economic implications of racism in America, and one that cultivated a love of black literature, music, and folklore. Both sets of her grandparents had had to flee sharecropping in Alabama and violence against African Americans in the south respectively, before settling in the steel-mill town of Lorain in Ohio. Born in 1931, Toni grew up at a time when the 1930s' Great Depression would have been especially taxing on a black, working class family. Her father George Wofford, a welder among two other jobs, was strongly distrustful of whites. Her mother Ramah Willis Wofford, who worked as a domestic worker, was slightly more hopeful of seeing race relations change in the country. Toni and her siblings were encouraged as children to internalise and get creative with these realities, listening to stories, remembering stories, even telling, changing, and performing them at home: "...to make us, and the race, confront the terrible things that were happening, to know that you could protect yourself through cunning and wit, by strength," she told the *Denver Post* in a 2003 interview.

Doing justice to the black experience through language became Toni's primary project. She did the job magnificently not because she simply wrote about African American characters, but because of the way she went about it.

Her fiction doesn't tell stories of black lives. It exists as a space in which black characters live out their experiences in real time, even as they repress and recollect past trauma. The stage time allowed to each of her characters is perhaps the most noticeable and admirable quality of Toni Morrison's work.

Take *Beloved* (1987), a novel about a tiny black life forced to end even before it has finished crawling and learned to walk. *Beloved's* existence is short-lived because it is innately 'raced', because generations of the child's ancestors have known only captivity under the white race, and because her mother Sethe, having just tasted freedom, would rather split the toddler's throat open than allow her back into slavery. The novel is populated, *densely*, by voices. Its structure forces us to spend time with each of them, so that we know how each person involved perceives a particular incident. Remember Sethe, her husband Halle, and Paul D who would later become her lover, all slaves at the Sweet Home plantation. If here a paragraph shows Sethe hurting, raging because Paul D didn't charge Halle enough for his passivity while Sethe was being tortured, there another chapter steps inside Paul D's mind. It reveals exactly why he remains silent, consumed by the pain of being gagged with the 'iron bit' in his mouth.

Morrison reveals these sufferings through echoes and memory and seldom through dialogue. It's neither a case of miscommunication in the plot, nor a crude ploy by the text to generate mystery and agitation for the reader's entertainment. It's about showing how words simply



fail at describing certain experiences. Discussing this scene with Paul D in her famous "The Art of Fiction" interview with *The Paris Review*, she explained how, "It was important to imagine the 'bit' as an active instrument, rather than simply as a curio or an historical fact. I wanted to show the reader what slavery *felt* like, rather than how it looked." As readers, as a result, we all but drown in the characters' personal journeys—be it *Denver*, *Sethe*, *Paul D*, or *Baby Suggs*—but we're snatched back just in time to remember that the story is ultimately *Beloved's*.

Their agonies may ring loud and true (as they should), but it is the pain of the most voiceless, the one most abruptly silenced, that Morrison manifests into an entire novel. She names the very book after her.

Speaking to the *Guardian*, Morrison once acknowledged how she couldn't tap into standard recorded 'history' to contextualise these stories. It would be ridiculous for her to look to Lewis Mumford or Thomas Jefferson's version of American history, or to Hemingway, Conrad, or Melville's portrayals of it even when they wrote about black characters.

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ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



TRIBUTE

After page 10

"There is no reliable literary or journalistic or scholarly history available to [black lives], to help them, because they are living in a society and a system in which the conquerors write the narrative of their lives," she explained. "First was my effort to substitute and rely on memory rather than history because I knew I could not, should not, trust recorded history to give me the insight into the cultural specificity I wanted. There was and is another source that I have at my disposal, however: my own literary heritage of slave narratives." On a somewhat similar vein, to *The Paris Review*, she addressed how, "In American literature we have been so totalised—as though there is only one version. We are not one indistinguishable block of people who always behave the same way."

And so her project became one of not just depicting, but de-totalising history, of unpinning it from a white-washed, male dominated narrative and bringing it down to the personal, the specific, the uniquely remembered. In her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), we experience the young Pecola struggling with her African American features, longing for blonde hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. What are the implications of such a desire? *Sula* (1973) pushes the premise of 'evil'—which Toni believed is perceived somewhat differently by African Americans ("They don't destroy it or throw it out of the house.")—to the centre of a novel that explores the contrasting experiences of stability and the lack thereof in black lives. *Song of Solomon* (1977) bottles in the journey of a single character—Milkman Dead—a saga of American history, infusing its ties with fantasy, folklore, music, and family roots. In her sixth novel *Jazz* (1992), Morrison takes us into 1926 Harlem, ringing with the cacophony of black urban lives.

These and her other works hardly ever aim for a clinical and 'objective' portrayal of events; instead, Toni's stories are richly coloured by the anger, resignation, and wonder felt by its inhabitants. The colours shine through in her nonfiction as much as in her 11 novels and handful of short stories. In her article "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib" for *The Times* written in 1971, she parses through a permutation of opinions regarding race and autonomy between black men, white men, black women, and white women. Both black and white men have historically dominated their female counterparts, but the black man's dominion over black women is also touched by a need to vent his pent-up rage. The black woman, unlike her white counterpart, has also historically known how to retaliate, because of the relative autonomy she possesses from having a place in the job market. The black woman also can't afford to exist simply as a sexual object even if the men around her cast her in that role, because she has *had* to be so many other things. "In a way black women have known something of the freedom white women are now beginning to crave. But oddly, freedom is only sweet when it is won. When it is forced, it is called responsibility. White women, on the other hand, have had too little responsibility, white men too much. It's a wonder the sexes of either race even

speak to each other," she wrote.

Fascination with literature drove Toni Morrison through high school, through her undergraduate and Master's degrees in English from Howard and Cornell universities respectively. It bore her through an editorship at Random House, her teaching tenure at Princeton, and the many awards she earned, the most prestigious of which were the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction 1988 and the Nobel Prize in Literature 1993. But as she asserted time and again in interviews, Toni was, above all, a reader. She basked completely

and entirely in the joy of reading, in the way a text can generate joy and ideas and resolve and empathy if one only knows how to play with language the right way. Her own words are proof of that, push and prod as they do the traditional boundaries of the English language. She has always twisted words to tweak their meanings—"memory" to "rememory", "rememory" to "re-remember"—and, by extension, our emotional and ideological responses to story and history. She economised with images and description, ensuring that we would imagine and feel,

instead of simply watching as a bystander. And with simple jumps in punctuation, she tempered her sentences to radiate nostalgia and anger and affection all in the same paragraph. Reading her, you recognise both a woman of fierce strength and courage, and a human being who believed utterly in storytelling as a vehicle of power and agency. The right kind of agency. In her absence, the words she left behind keep her project alive.

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ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSEIN AGAZ APURBO

After page 7

One man in the Jahangir Chowk area near Lal Chowk described Article 370 as a '*mangalsutra*' (sacred necklace worn by married women) symbolising a contract (analogous to the marital contract) between Kashmir and India.

Not all demanded restoration of Article 370. Many said that it was only the parliamentary parties who had asked people to have faith that India would honour the contract that was Article 370. The abrogation of Article 370 only discredited those "pro-India parties", and vindicated those who argued for Kashmir's "*azaadi*" (independence) from India, they felt. One man in Batamaloo said: "*Jo india ke geet gate hain, apne bande hain, ve bhi band hain!*" (Those who sang praises of India, India's own agents, they too are imprisoned!) A Kashmiri journalist observed, "Many people are happy about the treatment the mainstream parties are getting. These parties batted for the Indian State and are being humiliated now."

"Modi has destroyed India's own law, its own Constitution," was another common refrain. Those who said this, felt that Article 370 was more important to India (to legitimise its claim to Kashmir) than it was to Kashmir. But the Modi Government had not only sought to destroy Kashmir, it had destroyed a law and Constitution that was India's own.

In some ways, people were more concerned about the effects of the abrogation of 35A than that of 370. It is widely recognised that Article 370 retained only nominal, symbolic autonomy and had already been diluted. With 35A gone, though, people fear that "State land will be sold cheap to investors. Ambani, Patanjali etc can come in easily. Kashmir's resources and land will be grabbed. In Kashmir as it stands now, education and employment levels are better than in the mainland. But tomorrow Kashmiris will have to compete for Government jobs with those from other states. After one generation, most Kashmiris won't have jobs or be forced to move to the mainland."

There is widespread anger against the Indian media. People are imprisoned in their homes, unable to communicate with each other, express themselves on social media, or make their voices heard in any way. In their homes, they watch Indian TV claim that Kashmir welcomes the Government decisions. They seethe with rage at the erasure of their voices. As one young man in Safakadal put it, "*Kiski shaadi hai, aur kaun naach raha hai?!*" (It's supposed to be our wedding, but it's only others who are dancing!) If this move is supposed to be for our benefit and development, why not ask what we ourselves think about it?" "**Normalcy**", Or "**Peace of The Graveyard**"? Is the situation in Kashmir "normal" and "peaceful"? The answer is an emphatic NO.

One young man in Sopore said: "This is *bandoor ki khamoshi* (the silence at gunpoint), *kabristan ki khamoshi* (the peace of the graveyard)."

The newspaper *Greater Kashmir* had one (front) page of news and a sports page at the back: the two inside pages were full of cancellation announcements of weddings or receptions!

Between August 5-9, people had suffered for lack of food, milk, and basic needs. People had been prevented even from going to hospitals in case of sickness.

The Government claim is that only Section 144 has been imposed, not "curfew". But in reality, police vans keep patrolling Srinagar warning people to "stay safe at home and not venture out during the curfew", and tell shops to close their shutters. They demand that people display "curfew passes" to be allowed to move about.

All of Kashmir is under curfew. Even on Eid, the roads and bazaars were silent and desolate. All over Srinagar, mobility is restricted by concertina wires on streets, and massive paramilitary deployment. In many villages, *azaan* was prohibited by the paramilitary and people were forced to do *namaaz* prayers at home rather than collectively at the mosque as is usual on Eid.

In Anantnag, Shopian and Pampore (South Kashmir) on the day of Eid, we only saw very small kids dressed in Eid finery. Everyone else was in mourning. "We feel like we're in jail," said a woman in Guree (Anantnag). Girls in Nagbal (Shopian) said, "With our brothers in police or army custody, how can we celebrate Eid?"

On August 11, on the eve of Eid, a woman at Sopore told us she had come

the road.

We met two victims with pellet gun injuries in SMHS hospital in Srinagar. The two young men (Waqar Ahmad and Wahid) had faces, arms and torso full of pellets. Their eyes were bloodshot and blinded. Waqar had a catheter in which the urine, red with blood from internal bleeding, could be seen. Their family members, weeping with grief and rage, told us that the two men had not been pelting stones. They had been peacefully protesting.

On August 6, a graphic designer for the *Rising Kashmir* newspaper, Samir Ahmad (in his early 20s) had remonstrated with a CRPF man near his home in the Manderbag area of Srinagar, asking him to allow an old man to pass. Later the same day, when Samir opened the door to his house, CRPF fired at him with a pellet gun, unprovoked. He got 172 pellets in his arm and face near the eyes, but his eyesight is safe. It is clear that the pellet guns are deliberately aimed at the face and eyes, and unarmed, peaceful civilians standing at their own front doors can be targets.

At least 600 political leaders and civil society activists are under arrest. There is no



A checkpoint in downtown Srinagar on August 10.

PHOTO: **FACT-FINDING TEAM**

to the bazaar during a brief respite in the curfew, to buy a few supplies for Eid. She said: "We were prisoners in our own homes for seven days. Even today, shops are closed in my village Langet, so I came to Sopore town to shop for Eid and to check on my daughter who is a nursing student here."

"It's Army rule not Modi rule. There are more soldiers here than people," said a young baker at Watpura near Bandipora. His friend added, "We're afraid, because the army camp nearby keeps imposing impossible rules. They insist we have to return within half an hour if we leave home. If my kid isn't well, and I have to take her to the hospital, it may take more than half an hour. If someone visits their daughter who lives in the next village, they may take more than half hour to return. But if there's any delay, they will harass us." The CRPF paramilitary is everywhere, outside nearly every home in Kashmir. These are clearly not there to provide "security" to Kashmiris—on the contrary, their presence creates fear for the people. **Protests, Repression, and Brutality** Some 10,000 people were protesting in Soura (Srinagar) on August 9. The forces responded with pellet gun fire, injuring several. We attempted to go to Soura on August 10, but were stopped by a CRPF barricade. We did see young protestors on the road that day as well, blockading

clear information on what laws are invoked to arrest them, or where they are being held.

A very large number of political leaders are under house arrest—it is impossible to ascertain how many. We tried to meet CPIM MLA Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami—but were refused entry into his home in Srinagar, where he is being held under house arrest.

In every village we visited, as well as in downtown Srinagar, there were very young schoolboys and teenagers who had been arbitrarily picked up by police or army/paramilitary and held in illegal detention. We met a 11-year-old boy in Pampore who had been held in a police station between August 5 and August 11. He had been beaten up, and he said there were boys even younger than him in custody, from nearby villages.

Hundreds of boys and teens are being picked up from their beds in midnight raids. The only purpose of these raids is to create fear. Women and girls told us of molestation by armed forces during these raids. Parents feared meeting us and telling us about the "arrests" (abductions) of their boys. They are afraid of Public Security Act cases being filed. The other fear is that the boys may be "disappeared"—i.e. killed in custody and dumped in mass graves of which Kashmir has a grim history. As one

neighbour of an arrested boy said, "There is no record of these arrests. It is illegal detention. So if the boy "disappears"—i.e. is killed in custody—the police/army can just say they never had him in custody in the first place."

But the protests are not likely to stop. A young man at Sopore said: "*Jitna zulm karenge, utna ham ubharenge.*" (The more you oppress us, the more we will rise up). A familiar refrain we heard at many places was: "Never mind if leaders are arrested. We don't need leaders. As long as even a single Kashmiri baby is alive, we will struggle."

The Gag on Media

A journalist told us: "Newspapers are printing in spite of everything. Without the internet, we do not get any feed from agencies. We were reduced to reporting the J&K related developments in Parliament, from NDTV! This is undeclared censorship. If government is giving internet and phone connectivity to police but not to media houses what does it mean? We had some people come to our offices, speaking on behalf of Army and CRPF, asking "Why are you publishing photos of the curfew-affected streets?"

Kashmiri TV channels are completely closed and unable to function. Kashmiri newspapers that carry the barest mention of protests (such as the one on Soura) are made to feel the heat from the authorities. Foreign press reporters told us that they are facing restrictions on their movement by the authorities. Also, because of the lack of internet, they are unable to communicate with their own main offices. When we visited Press Enclave in Srinagar on August 13, we found the newspaper offices closed and the area deserted except for a few stray journalists, and some CID men. One of the journalists told us that papers could not be printed till at least August 17, because they have run out of newsprint which comes from Delhi.

Conclusion

The whole of Kashmir is, at the moment, a prison, under military control. The decisions taken by the Modi government on J&K are immoral, unconstitutional, and illegal. The means being adopted by the Modi government to hold Kashmiris captive and suppress potential protests are also immoral, unconstitutional, and illegal.

We demand the immediate restoration of Articles 370 and 35A.

We assert that no decision about the status or future of J&K should be taken without the will of its people.

We demand that communications—including landline telephones, mobile phones, and internet—be restored with immediate effect.

We demand that the gags on the freedom of speech, expression and protest be lifted from J&K with immediate effect. The people of J&K are anguished—and they must be allowed to express their protest through media, social media, public gatherings, and other peaceful means.

We demand that the gags on journalists in J&K be lifted immediately.

Jean Drèze is an economist; Kavita Krishnan is Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) and a member of the politburo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist); Maimoona Molla is a member of the AIDWA; Vimal Bhai is a member of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM).



Review of Arundhati Roy's Things that can and cannot be said

RAYNASALAM

After I finished *Things that can and cannot be said*, I stood in awe of how much power I held in my hands. In this slim volume were the musings, passing insights, and finally, the long-awaited encounter—albeit censored—of some of the strongest voices against modern-day empire.

Booker-winning writer Arundhati Roy and actor John Cusack travel to Moscow to meet Edward Snowden, the famed NSA whistleblower, and Vietnam-era intelligence hero Daniel Ellsberg, famous for leaking the Pentagon Papers. Through a series of informal essays and conversations (mostly between Roy and Cusack in the lead-up to the meeting), the surveillance debate is explored outside of the familiar context of privacy rights of US citizens and Western-centric corporate overreach, to include a broader discussion of global security and freedom.

To someone unexposed to Roy's political writing, this serves as a great primer. Even if you don't agree with her politics, her biting, poetic precision cuts to the heart of surveillance issues and everything it entails: security, nationalism, nuclear war, imperialism, morality. The format is raw and to-the-point even though it's edited and sequenced. It remains a conversation. Though it's not as polished and well-researched as her essays, it's not supposed to be—it's a series of thoughtful inspections of the world where a passing comment carries volumes of context and significance. It leaves you wanting, but it's this density of thought that gives it power and poignancy.

A central theme is an irreverence for borders and, naturally, the questioning of government. Roy calls for a new, radical

reimagining, and repeatedly asks Cusack in their conversations, what is a country, anyway? It's just an "administrative unit, a glorified municipality" and so why should we imbue it with esoteric meaning and protect it with nuclear bombs? Roy ponders sets of contradictions: "When people say, 'Tell me about India,' I say, 'Which India? ... The land of poetry and mad rebellion? The one that produces haunting music and exquisite textiles? The one that invented the caste system and celebrates the genocide of Muslims and Sikhs and the lynching of Dalits? The country of dollar billionaires? Or the one in which 800 million live on less than half a dollar a day?'"

She doesn't pull any punches—together, her talks with Cusack span the occasional hypocrisy of preaching nonviolence, the funding and depoliticisation of NGOs, capitalist rebranding, the moral super-state and Washington's inability to win its wars. It's thoughtful and sharp, but fast. The brisk pace makes it such that the quick repartees can leave you feeling more scattered than inspired, at least on the first read. However, it can serve as a jumping off point for her other work. Personally, whatever dots I didn't connect on the first read, I could on the second, even more after another reread once I read her fiction (*The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*) and collected essays, *The End of Imagination*. Many of the comments here merit entire, thought-out essays there.

The main disclaimer about this book is that it is billed as a conversation between Snowden, Ellsberg and Cusack, which it didn't end up being. It was an

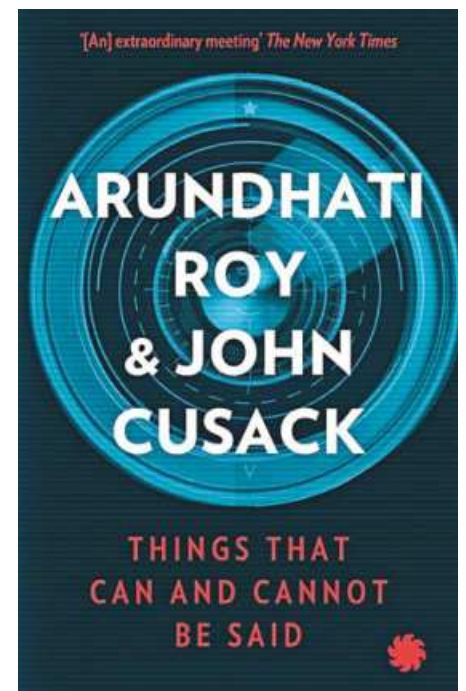
informal meeting, so it wasn't recorded and was squeezed in at the end like an afterthought. So be warned: this isn't the place where your favorite dissidents and whistleblowers meet up and make candid jokes about the state of the world. Or, at least, not jokes we get to hear. But somehow, from the conversations Roy and Cusack have before, walking the streets of Chicago, strolling around the Red Square, and attending stuffy human rights galas, you get a sense of what could have been said in that encounter.

In the diplomatic refuge of a hotel room, four politically exiled activists gather together to discuss their banishment, their privilege, and their ties to larger mass movements of exile. What does it mean to be exiled for a crime that is arguably an inherently patriotic act? Though we don't get the transcript, we get certain snippets: Cusack describes the scene once Snowden left the room and Ellsberg, after their talk of terrorism, war, greed, the police state and patriotism, began to weep.

Cusack narrates, "Through his tears, [Ellsberg] said 'That the best thing that the best people in our country like Ed can do is go to prison ... it's horrible, you know ...' Roy's eyes were sympathetic but distinctly unsettled."

There is something to be said about the writing in this book—it's like a shot to the heart. It is deeply moving and deeply sad. The questions posed are neither radical nor particularly conservative, but they are posed with such a stirring innocence that they seem like the simplest questions in the world: "What sort of love is this love that we have for countries? What sort of country is it that will ever live up to our dreams? What sort of dreams were these that have been broken?"

The book ends on this love, and once it



was closed, I was left with an unshakeable impression that we had all this power in our hands. That instances of profound moral courage are out there, and waning. That conversations must be had about statehood, borders, power and above all, questioning.

Rayna Salam is an intern at Star Weekend. She is studying International Development and Statistics at the University of California, Los Angeles.



PHOTO: SAYEED AHMED

A priceless gem in Copenhagen

How a private museum in Copenhagen is raising awareness on Islamic civilisation and its place in human history

SAYEED AHMED

On a short trip to Copenhagen, my wife and I, having just visited the Little Mermaid and the Hans Christian Andersen museum, are wandering where to go next. Just then, by a sheer stroke of luck, someone at the tourist information centre casually mentions The David Collection, a museum that specialises in Islamic decorative art. We are instantly hooked. A short walk from the National Art Gallery, we reach a neo-classical building housing the Davids Samling, as it is called in Danish. We walk in, along with a group of school children.

There is no entry fee, a pleasant surprise. Upon a deposit of DKK 10, we get a tablet with a special button on the back, which if tapped against a similar one next to any display, activates the relevant description in English. We head straight to the Islamic Art section that occupies the top two floors. We step out of the lift, and are instantly transported into the realm of Islam: the mesmerising "Orient" with its fragrances, colours, mannerisms, wisdom, artisans, warriors, sages, polymaths, travellers, painters, courtyards, and arabesque designs. It's a panorama of Islamic civilisation across its length and breadth, from Spain to India also detailing its interactions with other civilisations.

Mind blowing. Rich. Dizzying.

The museum is organised in 20 sections—from The Prophet Mohammad to mid-19th-century India, covering almost every chapter of the Islamic world in between, including the Samanids, Il-Khanids and Golden Horde, Mamluks, Seljuks of Rum and Ottomans. Each is presented in its historical context, with



Miniature from an Arabic translation of Dioscorides De Materia Medica, Iraq, 1224.

texts, maps, art, coin, architecture, textiles, books and tools, supplemented by three special collections—miniature painting, calligraphy, and textiles. A resource area presents a number of subjects outside their chronological and geographical contexts: 14 cultural history themes; the phenomenon of revivals, forgeries and restoration; and artistic techniques. The cultural history themes include varied subjects, such as: Symbolism in Islamic Art; Trade, Measures and Weights; Mechanics, Astronomy and Astrology; Medical Science; and Art of War.

The sheer number of exhibits is worth

noting, way too large to be accommodated in the two floors allocated to the collection. Many items are on display with glass covers, many more are inside drawers for the visitor to pull out and view. It is not possible to describe the whole museum in this short piece and I will only try to give an overview, along with some relevant historical facts.

This stunning collection starts with the origins of Islam at Mecca. We are then led to parchment leaves of the handwritten Quran in different calligraphic styles—Hijazi from the second half of 7th century, Kufi from circa 900 North Africa, Maghribi from 14th century Spain or Morocco and so on. The Hijazi Quran, written down shortly after the Prophet's death, is one of the oldest that has been preserved. Calligraphy adorned with miniature paintings were at the core of Islamic art since the beginning. Later, miniature paintings became independent works of art.

One such miniature work on display is the Arabic translation of Dioscorides De Materia Medica from 13th century Baghdad. Arab pharmacology borrowed significantly from the Greeks and this book is a testament to the importance it gained in the Islamic world. It is a product of the House of Wisdom, a grand library in Baghdad, founded in the 8th century, which undertook large scale translation of Greek and Syriac works to Arabic. Such translation movements led to some of the seminal breakthroughs in science, astronomy and medicine.



Astrolabe, brass, engraved and inlaid with silver. PHOTOS: WWW.DAVIDMUS.DK

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| TRAVEL |

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Another gallery is displaying the Constellation Gemini in an illustrated copy of al-Sufi's *Kitab suwar al-Kawakib* (The Book of Fixed Stars) from 17th-century Iran. Astronomy was important in the Islamic world to determine the times of prayers and the direction of the Qibla, as well as for navigation. From 9th century onwards, data from antique



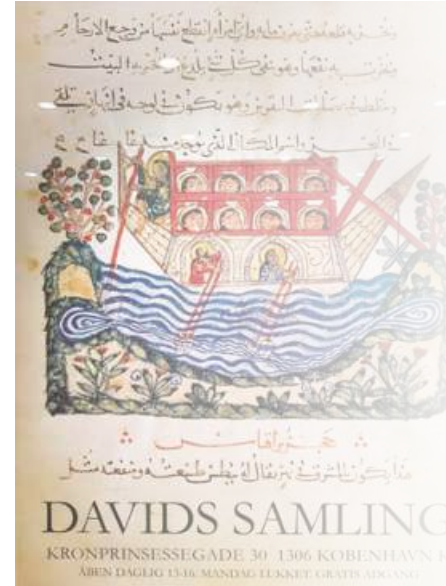
Parchment leaf from Quran written in Hijazi script



Pen case, brass, engraved and inlaid with silver, Mosul, Iraq, 1255-56.



Inscription frieze, from the Nilometer, Cairo, Egypt, 861-862.



Poster of The David Collection

writings were compared with observations made in the Islamic world and the results were compiled in new treatises. It was the Syrian Arab astronomer Al-Shatir (1304-1375) who developed the first accurate lunar model that matched physical observations of its distance from the Earth. Copernicus (1473-1543) proposed his lunar and Mercury models, both identical to those of al-Shatir's, almost a century later. However, it is not known if Copernicus was familiar with the works of Al-Shatir.

The gallery on textiles is showing intricate designs on oriental rugs, robes and royal dresses, woven in different techniques with wool, linen, silk, cotton and Muslins, dyed with vegetable and minerals. "Art of War" gives an overview of how Islam transformed the squabbling

Arab tribes into the most formidable military might in the world that fought relentlessly to spread their belief at a lightning speed, bringing decisive victories from Spain to India and beyond.

Islamic medicine was once the most advanced in the world, combining ancient Greek, Roman, Persian and Indian medicines. It was in 8th century Baghdad that the world's first modern hospital was founded and the concept of public

foundation of the most important part of his collection, The Islamic Art, which has now come to be the museum's *raison d'être* in a Scandinavian context. David's Islamic Art is not a large collection when compared with similar others around the world. However, this is perhaps the only of its kind in Northern Europe that tells a story, connects the dots and gives a bigger picture of Islam and its place in history.

The museum repeatedly makes the



The David Collection

health service introduced. Muslim artisans invented new techniques and improvised existing ones in pottery, glassmaking, metal, stone and stucco, wood, ivory and leather.

As we walk through the galleries, we bump into the same school group we have met earlier, sitting on the floor around their teacher, listening to him attentively. The teacher doesn't forget to apologise to us for the "inconvenience" they are causing. We only smile and move on.

The David Collection was founded by Christian Ludvig David (1878-1960), a famous lawyer in Copenhagen. David started in 1910 with a few Danish paintings and sculptures. He soon developed a special interest in porcelain from the Islamic world, which laid the

point that Islamic civilisation contributed significantly to the advancement of science, technology, governance and philosophy. And that it acted as a bridge between Greek and Roman civilisations and European Renaissance. The deep respect and humility shown to Islamic traditions is unmissable. Such museums help us realise that in this world no nation, or for that matter civilisation, can grow alone, and everyone is indebted to others for what they are today. They facilitate reconciliation among nations, and challenge the current trend of post-truth politics. A must-see in Denmark.

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| BURNTHEWATCHTOWER |

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The theory of re-Orientalism is not without its critics, with Minoli Salgado in particular castigating Lau for reinforcing the East-West divide of Orientalism by arguing that diasporic writers—reductively framed as at once of the East and outside it, instead of the complex relations of belonging unique to each person—perpetuate Orientalism. While Salgado's critique is dense reading primarily of interest to academics (i.e. no one anyone else wants to spend time with), re-Orientalism hits at the fundamental problems of belonging. Where ought we situate ourselves?

Where can we?

Ironically, there are aspects of South Asian culture that really can only be written by the West-based diaspora. Writers on 'sensitive' subjects as such minority rights, homosexuality, feminism or atheism have had good reason to be afraid to voice their opinions at home, leaving them little

recourse but to either stay silently vulnerable, or to export their voices. In doing so, such diasporic authors may indeed reproduce what Lau calls re-Orientalism, either benignly or through having a bone to pick, playing into the established Western tropes of the backward, violent East. It is difficult to discuss such subjects without resorting to unflattering comparisons to Western countries, which are modern and aspirational. Orientalism obscures the role colonial states played in perpetuating and codifying the same systems of oppression that Western liberals pride themselves on having "overcome" at home (though the myth of Western domestic progress is being increasingly exposed through the resurgence of right-wing politics.) Not glorifying the West may be a hard sell for diasporic authors who cannot even express themselves at 'home'. The sympathy bred from belonging is difficult in the face of alienation.

In my own limited writing career I've

run into the problem of writing about themes I'm familiar with—for example, animal sacrifice—and the confusion this elicited from Western readers for whom this is exotic, and should be treated as such. I have been asked whom my intended audience is. My use of visibly non-Western elements in Western-centric media such as cyberpunk fiction has been critiqued as purely cosmetic, difference for the sake of difference. Otherness must have some utility, it cannot simply be. However, where is the authenticity in a man born and raised in Dhaka writing something Jane Smith could have churned out—and probably better?

While I don't consider myself diasporic as yet, I cannot claim to feel true belonging anywhere. I'm an Anglophone, English medium, Western-educated academic and writer from a well-off family. These are the filters through which I perceive Bangladeshi life, and my representation of it in my writing is arguably inauthentic and

Western-centric (I could not have written this article in Bangla). Is it my personal duty at this point to shed these filters and immerse myself in "my" culture in order to create work that does not perpetuate the legacy of Orientalism? Should I abandon trying to be intelligible and sympathetic to a Western audience because in order to do so I may—intentionally or otherwise—write stereotypically and reductively about 'my' culture?

Doesn't the luxury of writing something abroad that I would not dare write in Dhaka vindicate Orientalism?

I don't know, but I think we should ask ourselves these questions and seriously wonder how to avoid the perpetuation of Orientalism in our work—with an increasing awareness of how practically difficult this may in fact be.

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ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

identify themselves as superior to an imagined Eastern Other. East and West in this context are concepts agnostic of time and space, equally relevant in the colonial, postcolonial, post-Cold War and post-9/11 worlds. Regardless of where in the world you were or who you dealt with, East and West was the binary split between the colonised and the colonisable, the civilised and the savage, the powerful and the powerless. This is why the imagined West includes Australia while excluding Albania.

While the details have changed, key to the East-West binary is the notion that the West's position of relative material power makes it producer, curator and arbiter of legitimate knowledge. America was not 'discovered' by the people already living there before Columbus rolled up. Domination of knowledge not only allows the West to constitute who and what count as Eastern, but determines 'facts' about the East. Facts such as the legitimate existence of an Iraqi nation, but not a Kurdish one. The practise of the West imagining the East and then telling the East what it is, Said called Orientalism.

While the West of yesterday attempted to define the East through cartography and the science of skull shape measuring,

about gay marriage can attest.

While it might be tempting to dub this as reverse Orientalism, in the case of Easterners stereotyping the West there has not been an equivalent reversal in material power that would give these stereotypes teeth, and the domination of national minorities is invariably the continuation of colonial-era, Western-led, projects.

Nevertheless, Orientals are arguably capable of Orientalism. Lisa Lau has presented the theory of re-Orientalism, which states:

"...the East (in particular South Asia) has now seized self-representation to a large degree, yet continues to draw on Western referential points and use Western yardsticks as it attempts to self-define. Moreover and insidiously... contemporary re-Orientalising, Eastern representations continue to be Western-centric: maintaining the status quo of the original orientalist dichotomy, reinforcing the centrality of the West."

Lau formulated her theory through an examination of English language literature by diasporic South Asian writers. In her analysis, writers in the diaspora have a tendency to stereotype, simplify and exoticise their 'home' countries in their work—a joint result of themselves often not being situated in the societies they write about, and the need to convey meaning to the Western audiences of their Western publishers.

Readers of diasporic authors will recognise this in narrators explaining their societies to readers like outsiders looking in, talking about 'common' practices such as arranged marriage or kite-flying as though there is a secret understanding between them and the readers that these are, in fact, rare and remarkable phenomena. Characters and situations in re-Orientalist literature must display and embody Indian-ness, or Muslimhood, or whatever other label they are classified under for the convenience of the Western reader. With its fetish for presenting South Asia as excitingly different to the West, re-Orientalism prevents the presentation of complexity. The development of empathy through nuanced, natural and diverse storytelling is axed in favour of homogenous exoticism.

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THE TRAP OF RE-ORIENTALISM



"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," wrote Rudyard Kipling, a man with a silly name who only had a career because West met East and immediately mugged it, running off with wallet, shoes and pants. Through Kipling's pen, the British learned about India, and through Kipling and English medium schooling the British taught India about 'itself'.

West and East are not just changeable, cardinal directions, but a worldview. Edward Said said in *Orientalism* that the Orient (East) was a construction of the Occident (West), whereby Westerners (Judeo-Christian, European, white) could

Orientalism's framework persists in the Western practices of going to India to 'find oneself', in French hijab bans and 'random' searches by airport security. Something like Orientalism is also practiced in and by the East as well, where administrations and academies in former colonies attempt to classify and contain their own domestic Others—religious and ethnic minorities, particularly indigenous populations, are vulnerable not just to discrimination but being told by the State who they are. Similarly, Easterners have their own ideas about the West, as anyone who's ever heard their grandfather talk



ঐতিহ্যের আর এক নাম আধুনিকতা
ঠিক যেমন রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য মানেই

অ্যান্ডালিনা

সোপ

রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য...



us on /Sandalina

