

Barbers...but not quite the Sweeney Todds

Your barber is no ordinary man.

He knows your deepest secrets.

How you wish to hide the sparse hair at the junction of the parietal and occipital bones....

.....or, the receding hairline.

If you are one who prefers a 'comb over,' he is your guy!

Growing up in the '80s, my relationship with the famous, or should I say, infamous napit, was bitter sweet. At that time, there were obviously no 'salon' for men, and the best place one had the option to go to was Hotel Purbani, or any of the 5-star establishments. We could not afford it either.

My grandmother took me to the local barber shop, with a strict instruction of a 'bati chaat' — the recommended style in the school rule book. There was also the 'crew cut.'

Was there any difference between the 'crew' and the 'bati...?' I could not say, simply because I ended up looking like a 'chila murgi' (I am not sure if the English language even have a word to describe it!)

The '90s saw changes...some radical. The first being, I got to choose what I wanted. By sheer virtue of having sparse hair, I never could get the 'Rahul Cut' the girls

were so crazy about. Yes, by then, puberty happened and it was more important to impress the girls, even if it meant detention for disregarding school rules.

There was another big change. The barbers I met in the '80s spoke in a language I could not fathom; as times passed, these familiar faces no longer spoke in that alien tongue, but in Bangla, but with a distinct dialect. It took me years to pin the language, and feel for the plight of those barbers who regularly cut my hair.

But that is another story, for another day!

It felt good to go to a barber-shop in the '90s. They would no longer make me sit on a wooden plank.

There would no longer be an assistant who would hold my head firmly so that movement was impossible, while the other swiftly chopped my hair strands. And by then, they greeted me with a Salam. Pleased my ego! "Boss, bhalo asen. Onekdin porey ashlen?" and I felt like Michael Corleone!

By the time I had reached my mid-teens, Dhaka already had a 3-tier barber hierarchy — the Italians, the makeshifts on the road-side; a chair and one mirror in front was all that was there.

Then there were the familiar neighbourhood barbers, now friendlier and desperate in their attempt to tie his lineage to a particular community. And high-end salons!

They say, there are 100,000 scalp hair follicles in the human head.

I had about 10,000. And I was quick and smart enough to understand that they need 'environmental conservation.'

So, basically since grade nine, I have had the same haircut, a return to the innocence, if you may. 'Crew' was back!

There was another big change — the silent barber, by then had started to talk! Mostly, sports. Abahoni/Mohammedan; Brazil/Argentina. Cricket had not yet caught us like wildfire at the time. And of course, soon it was cricket, Cricket, CRICKET.

I enjoy it. How they will casually slip in an 'add on' that can miraculously stop hair fall and make the

follicles grow; or how some magic treatment can cure my dandruff once and for all, and THAT facial which is the Godsend answer to the acnes on my face.

But I am a hard cookie, but their perseverance amazes me!

I have been going to the same barber shop, they might take offence that I refer to them as a shop and not a salon for the last 20 odd years. A decent place that I have seen evolve from a 40 taka haircut place to services that go as high as five thousand!

I still keep a low key. My 'crew' and 'beard trimming.' The barbers no longer hide their accent in front of me, perhaps because they know it matters not a bit.

Strangely, I have no idea what the name of the salon is, let alone the name of the barbers. And I guess, to them I am just "Boss!"

Just after the cricket world cup final, I needed an urgent cut and it was too late for my regular, so I decided to pay the neighbourhood one a visit. While to my relief, I got the silent one, my sole companion was engaged in a heated discussion.

And within the next 15 minutes, I observed their topic change from cricket, to politics, and religion. And soon, with great alarm, the conversation was getting heated up. And then, it erupted like a volcano!

As every man worth his salt knows, and knows well...this is everyday matter at the barber shop. He knows the client and the client knows the barber, but it is always the stranger who gets alarmed!

By the time the barber went for the shave, the topic had concentrated on a tele-evangelist, and I felt a cold shiver pass down my spine at the prospect of seeing a homicide.

Of course, nothing happened. The client paid Tk 120, plus 'bokshish' and the barber said, "Boss, abar ashben!"

The barber-client dynamics is truly strange. It's a deep bond that goes beyond names and origin. And like I said, they know more about your insecurity than your personal therapist!

By The Lizard King
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed



Karl Lagerfeld — The one and only K

His pet cat is an heiress, his personal look has been celebrated as a mix of campiness meets stern silhouette, his name has been associated with a diet plan and throughout his lifetime, he has been known for his sharp wit and words — yes, we are talking about none other than Karl Lagerfeld.

Earlier this year, in February, the fashion world mourned the death of this acclaimed fashion designer, known for his innovative, in-the-moment style. Lagerfeld's multitasking capacities across companies has set new standards as he had been at the helm of not only Chanel and Fendi, but also his eponymous label Karl Lagerfeld. Chanel, in particular, owes the last three decades' success to him as he revved up this almost dying brand to the fashion behemoth it is today. Even the well-recognised Chanel logo with the two interlocked 'C'-s owes its origins to Lagerfeld.

An avid reader who was always sketching new ideas and being bold to the point of outrageous in cases — Karl Lagerfeld is not one to be remembered for a 'signature look,' particularly when compared to his rival Yves Saint Laurent. Yet, his work style and management, as well as vision were intrinsic to the successes for the brands he was part of.

With his upcoming birthday on 10 September, the fashion world will once again remember this icon, not only for the commendable body of work he has left, but rather, for the direction to which he has taken fashion to.

Happy Birthday, Karl.

By Iris Farina
Photo: Collected