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These activist singers are reminding us of that moral obligation by using words like brick, rock, concrete - those that constituted the scenes from the collapse.

Another song titled *No More Press Note*, written and composed by Kafil Ahmed and translated by Naeem Mohaiemen, exposes how governments, one after another, approve unacceptable working conditions in the sweatshops of Bangladesh. The song reveals working conditions where factories are like prisons and when the workers die there, the government only issues press notes without taking any responsibility. As a result, nothing changes over the years. The singer wants the governments to do something concrete to bring change to the

PHOTO: **AFP**

We should not forget the names that were crushed under greed, lack of empathy, and lax governance for the sake of development, output, and production.

inhumane working environment:

"You have locked me up
You have burnt me to death
Press Note, only Press Note
I don't want, I don't want any more Press Note
Trapped in this suffocating room
I defy my prison
I defy your prison
Why is factory a jail for thousands
Why is life frozen like this
Endless work but we never get paid
We don't earn to even live"

Here the words of defiance are used by the artist to arouse a sense of urgency to protest the extant situation. They portray the dream of the workers to have a better life, away from greed and exploitation. These songs were written and performed by activists who organised cultural events to protest the deaths in Rana Plaza, and raised money to do rescue work, treatment, and rehabilitations of the victims. This is how activists frame injustice using words that demonise the greed of global economy in its global periphery.

Another effort to make us remember the disaster that also resonated with global consumers and activists is portrayed and sustained through photography exhibitions using Bangladeshi photographs and juxtaposing it against that of New York's Triangle Factory Fire more than a hundred years ago. Robin Berson created a 'memorial quilt' similar to the one she created for the Triangle fire victims,with photographs of the Tazreen and Rana Plaza victims. Photos were collected from the posters hung by relatives searching for missing workers in Rana Plaza. Thus, she juxtaposed the faces of American women with that of the women who lost lives in Bangladesh a century later, in similarly brutal working conditions. It serves to remind us that although the line of production they work on is endless, workers of the developing world, including Bangladesh, work under brutal, inhumane, and unsafe conditions. Berson hopes that the quilts will elicit empathy among the viewers for the humanity, beauty, and fragility shared by the dead youths. At the same time, they can strengthen the sense of moral kinship and responsibility among people all over the world.

As an activist performer, playwright, and researcher, I have also resorted to framing injustices in my creative work on workers in Tazreen and Rana Plaza. Through my play *Jatugriho* (The House of the Melted Wax), produced by BotTala (a performance space), I wanted to remind audiences what these victims went through. We should not forget the names that were crushed under greed, lack of empathy, and lax governance for the sake of development, output, and production. I did not want anyone to forget how a person alive must have felt to burn to death. What they were thinking during their last moments! Corpses were found in Tazreen in embraces just as they were caught on camera in Rana Plaza. But their families did not receive compensation, missing victims were not identified even after DNA tests, local owners of the factories in Rana Plaza and BGMEA did not pay a penny in compensation. In such a setting, in my play, dead bodies in body bags on a van rickshaw begin to talk. They say that no one killed them, they just died. A song opens the play:

"Jatugriha burns, the bees burn too
The Pandavas had a tunnel to escape
But we have no exit.
Still, no one killed us
We just died."

The reflexive emotion—outrage—was incited through the play, often performed on street corners and open places in RMG areas, and the audience were mostly workers. The play ends with a song by Kafil Ahmed that, against all the odds, continues to sketch the dream of better working conditions. The play was translated by Munasir Kamal and Saumya Sarker and directed by Mohammad Ali Haider.

In the play, Nobi, a van rickshaw puller, while paddling the rickshaw full of body bags from the Tazreen fire, says: "Are you a man or the devil? How much more do you want, you thief of thieves? So many people! So many dead bodies! Burnt to ashes! Ashes and charred remains! They have murdered so many people!"

Then the dead workers tell their story, their lives, aspirations, and the violent and excruciating ending. They tell us about how ridiculously owners claim that whenever the workers want their dues or better working conditions, they are "conspiring" against the industry. It creates a reality where they live on very low wages, inhumane personal vulnerabilities, and brutal working conditions, in order to create profit for a very small group of people who are irresponsible and greedy and want to earn more money disregarding the worth and dignity of the workers' lives.

The Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath saw changes in the working conditions of garment factories in Bangladesh. Though I would be wary of over-generalising such success, much of it can be attributed to the long-continued efforts of activists and general citizens working to end such heinous labour practices. Activist artists framed those injustices through the emotional messages of compassion, which helped create moral obligation for people to work against such brutality.

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A generation learned to live in fear. They cast their votes in silence, for leaders who thrived on their silence. When war ravaged the countries they had once called home, they prayed in silence. When newspapers spoke of hate crimes they told their children, quietly, to remain silent. All Muslims dared do was have the audacity to live.

In schools across America, no one spoke of the unspeakable horrors their country had wreaked on the world. No course talked of the fraught history of the Middle East, the invasions of Afghanistan, the US backing of the Taliban. In the American imaginary, extremism had erupted out of ether.

The war on terror became the rallying cry of a generation. Reasons were minted, regimes crushed, militants emboldened. The memory of those who had suffered was desecrated by making a million more suffer. Across the world, terror sought to root out terror.

One day, long after the dust had settled, America looked into the mirror and confronted a stranger.

When we moved to New York, summer was waning. At the airport, we were taken aside to be vetted: our names had raised all sorts of red flags. Our phones were taken away, our luggage thoroughly checked. When we got out at last, my cousins assured us this was routine procedure.

Later that week, in the crisp of fall, we visited Lady Liberty, walked around Ellis Island amongst the history of people who had traveled the ocean to call New York home. We went to Central Park, heard a busker sing *Hey Jude* at Imagine Square. After lunch, we braved Brooklyn Bridge, debated turning back but pushed on and made it to the Pier.

Across from us stood Manhattan; on our left, in the distance, Lady Liberty bathed itself in the last rays of the September sun. When night arrived, the city lit up, and two beams of light shot up into the sky. As tourists took photos, we stood in silence, breathing in the air.

It smelled, ever so slightly, of fire.

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