



ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

# In search of a therapist navigating the crazy of Dhaka and some more (m)adventures in between

ABC\*

I woke up with a start at 06:09 am that morning on April 10. It was the sharp ring of the alarm clock going off at this ungodly hour that made me jump up. For a brief moment I wondered why it had gone off so early before I remembered it was that day. I was supposed to go look for an old house in Elephant road and in that house was a man who promised to help make sense of all the madness unravelling around me.

This would be my first one on one meeting with Prasanta\*, my new counselor with whom I knew I shared one thing in common—our dialect.

I had met him during a training session just a week prior to this but that was the extent of our communication back then. Limited to conversations between a trainer and his audience, teaching various concepts of “stroke”—a concept in psychoanalysis—which initiates or obstructs conversations and communication. It was

intriguing, to say the very least, and got me stuck on the idea that this man could be It. Maybe he was the therapist I had been looking for—for near about a decade.

The weather was comfortable, thanks to a late night *Kalboishakhi* storm. With the window rolled down, we swerved left and right, right and left, until finally making it through the early morning school and office traffic and the usual Dhaka madness before I finally made it to Elephant road. This was where he stayed. Inside a dead-end alley, with bougainvillea hanging low, stood the old maroon building and as I walked in, I noticed him standing in the verandah. Sipping tea and waving me in.

Four-part doors opened to reveal the study which also worked as a part-time office room that looked out into a tiny verandah lined with hundreds of plants, all washed a vibrant green from yesterday's rain.

It was unlike any other therapy session I had been to. The clinical, almost mechanical approach that I was prepared for and so used to from previous such experiences was removed from this one. We settled down. He, on his cane chair, while I sat opposite him and we talked and talked, like two friends catching up. I told him about my paranoia and scares, and of strange hallucinations that would get me riled up. I told him of the past year and how difficult it felt and as we talked he helped me unravel some of the more jumbled up thoughts inside my head.

I could watch it happen. As he picked on a train of thought and used his understanding of such issues to untie the Gordian knot and lay it out in front of me.

I do not remember anymore how long that first session went on for but I remember getting out of it and walking as though someone had fit clouds under my shoes. And for a brief moment, I felt

in control, as though things would be better. I can assure you, I am not. Mostly because mental illnesses do not go away with one (or a hundred) session. They are like my no-tangle earphones which always get tangled up (this investment has however made it much easier to untangle—both mind and earphones).

It is difficult finding a therapist in Dhaka. Not only is there a deep-rooted stigma associated with getting help, a great part of the population is also unaware of the need for such help. There is also a dearth of such professionals in the country as well. And chances that you will get along with them are still very slim.

A long time back, I read how finding a therapist can be akin to dating, how difficult it can be to find one that you click with and how it could still fall apart after a few dates or in this case, a few sessions.

Continued to page 14