

The Shame of Being a Man

"The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write?" — Gilles Deleuze



I woke up with a colleague's hesitant post on Facebook wishing his friends well on the International Men's Day. The comment thread is filled with issues ranging from locker room banter to

the high theory on the dominant form of masculinity. Frankly, I didn't know that there was a day reserved for men (November 19). Now that I do, maybe I will be better prepared to defend March 8 against the charge of being discriminatory. I, therefore, turned to my daily dose of morning news. The man accused of raping a DU student at Airport Road has been given life imprisonment. Good. The Daily Star has talked to a Member of Parliament about his comments that wearing T-shirts makes women vulnerable to rape, reminding one of the infamous "tamarind theory" promulgated by a recently deceased religious leader. Dreadful. The Samakal reports that a mortuary assistant of the Suhrawardy Hospital in Dhaka has been allegedly found guilty of necrophilia; his secret came out when a forensic team started investigating the presence of semen in the body of a young suicide victim. Disgusting.

The news samples taken that morning revealed a pathological crisis and are enough to blur my position on the dominant masculinity that pervades our society. Is it possible for me to detach myself from the samples that I just shared?

In my introductory class on gender, I often ask my students to close their eyes and tell me about the first image that comes to their mind when they hear the word "man". Most think of a muscle-

bound homo sapien (usually sports or media icons with ribbed bellies); a few mention their fathers or brothers. But no one has ever mentioned Newton, Einstein, Churchill or Hitler. I wonder why and how such image of masculinity is injected in our system!

With the rise of wide-reaching #MeToo or #MasculinitySoFragile movements, men are fast being touted as nothing more than unthinking and emotionless sexual predators. The proof is in the pudding, and there is little room to deny such an allegation. For instance, when you watch the clip from the "subsequent" Borat film in which a conservative politician reaches for his manhood during an interview with an undercover actress-journalist, you know that the fairytale wolf of Red Riding Hood is not a thing of the past. Men are dangerous. They always have been. They pose threats. They can be the most powerful man in the world with a finger on a nuclear bomb or a druggie Md Majnu roaming the sidewalks of Airport Road.

There was a time when we could sing the greatness of men, ignoring their follies and foibles. The medieval church once promoted the concept of Great Chain of Being in which God sits atop with man conveniently niched between angels and animals. The vertical arrangement with man at the third place is summed up brilliantly by Shakespeare, who made Hamlet ponder: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals." Indeed, man has the qualities of an angel, animal and God.

Unfortunately, we have slid down the chain to lose sight of "noble reason" and "infinite faculty" to become mere animals. I am sure there are many animals and animal-lovers who will take offence at such a comparison. Trust me, I love animals too.

On a serious note, do we really need

a day to celebrate men when there are so many reasons to be ashamed of being a man? This made me look up the six objectives of the day, which include: "Valuing male role models; acknowledging the contribution of men and boys; improving male health; tackling discrimination and disadvantage; fostering positive gender relations; and making the world a safer place for everyone."

Ah, the last point. Yes, we need to protect the vulnerable groups of the world from the evil eyes and deeds of



"I suffer from the twin attack of shame and guilt: one that rusts outside and the other that corrodes from inside."

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

men. The danger from men, after all, can come in different shapes and sizes: they can come as political or religious leaders, soldiers or solicitors, employers or teachers, relatives or strangers. Then again, we should not paint everyone with the same brush. We need to acknowledge the contributions of men and celebrate those who could be role models. He could be a fire fighter, a frontline worker, a bread earner. The positive role played by the gender should not be overlooked. At the same

time, their well-being should also be taken into account. This year's theme is pertinent in this context. It says, "better health for men and boys."

While reading about this year's theme, I learned that men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women. The pressure of being a man is often overlooked. These are complex issues, and they cannot be separated from the violence exhibited by men.

The mental makeup of boys and men is conditioned by an environment

driver caused a serviceman to lose his dignity in public, the men behind the two-wheeler ganged up and sized up the perpetrator in an episode of "who's the man, now?" Such daily display of machismo is normalised as hormonal tide and ebb. The violence committed against the weak and the vulnerable is no different from those done against the women and female children; they all involve a deviation from the normal—even if in different degrees. I have no intention of slighting the violence done against women, but I think November 19 has provided an opportunity for us, the male, to reflect on the daily battles and realities that we face as males. After all, can I deny the fact that I am privileged as a man in a patriarchy?

I know what my spouse has to go through to become who she is in her career today even though we shared the same educational, social and cultural backgrounds; yet our experiences in terms of gender expectations in our professional careers have never been the same. When it comes to the issue of property or promotion, the male card has always come handy. And as a father of a bright young daughter, I sometimes feel ashamed of having brought her in a world that does not have gender parity. I suffer from the twin attack of shame and guilt: one that rusts outside and the other that corrodes from inside.

What then are my options: to continue to recognise myself as someone who silently approves and accepts these conditions of violence and gives consent to identify with the givers of such violence? Or to dissociate myself from the essential solidarity that I have with my fellow beings? Or is there a promise of moral sensibility and sanity that can one day be attained with the right education and orientation?

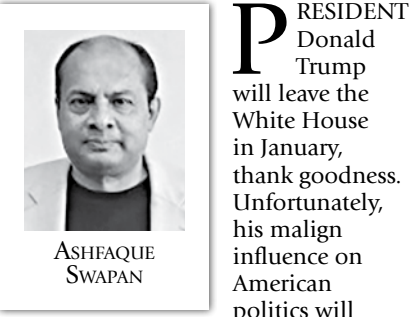
I look forward to a day when I am not ashamed—not as a man or a woman, but as a human being.

Shamsad Mortuza is a professor of English at Dhaka University (now on leave). Currently, he is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of ULAB.

Trump's enablers – a grave threat to a nation in crisis

"I could spend a full-time job just responding to the ridiculously illogical, inconsistent, and blatantly stupid arguments supporting Trump... But here's the thing: his supporters DON'T CARE about facts or logic. They aren't seeking truth... And this is the cumulative reason why this nation is in such terrible shape: We don't have truth seekers; we have narcissists." — Former Colorado law professor Jenna Ellis in a Facebook post in March 2016.

"My mind was changed based on fact and personal knowledge. President Trump is a sincere Christian, the best president in modern history, and made and kept his promises to the American people. I am proud to stand with him and his goals for the future of this country and all of its citizens." — Ellis, in a statement on November 18, 2020 in response to CNN's report of her previous Facebook statement. Ellis, one of Trump's most ardent defenders since joining his campaign as a legal adviser a year ago, has joined former New York Mayor Rudolf Giuliani in a futile, almost farcical legal effort to reverse the projected victory of Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.



Pundits are wondering about what Trump will do next. Will he start a media company? Will he continue



Trump's belligerence and his enablers' silence have resulted in a disquieting refusal of his supporters to accept the people's verdict.

PHOTO: JIM WATSON/AFP

to be a Republican kingmaker? Will his influence simply peter out? They miss the broader, existential threat to American democracy.

It is Trumpism that is the real threat. This is a profound sickness in the American body politic, driven by a gut Republican hatred of Democrats so deep that policy or facts are irrelevant. Just one quick example: Republicans hated Obamacare so much that when they ruled the House, they repealed it 50 times. What's their alternative? Now that's the best kept secret in the world.

To be sure, the Democratic Party also has its share of firebrand partisans, but over the past few decades, it is the Republican Party that's gone off the deep end. Way back in 2012, Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, two scrupulously nonpartisan scholars of politics, wrote in their book *"It's Even Worse Than It Looks"*: "One of the two major parties, the Republican Party, has become an insurgent outlier—

ideologically extreme; contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

In the Trump era, I wish to single out a particular set of enablers of the greatest opprobrium: People who ought to know better, but have nevertheless made a Faustian bargain for political expediency.

Jenna Ellis, the fierce Trump defender quoted at the beginning, cannot be dismissed as some clueless rural rube. She is a knowing accomplice to Trump's destructive, mendacious, post-election belligerence. Don't take my word for it. She spelled out how toxic Trump supporters are in the quoted Facebook post. Her claim to CNN about her change of heart about Trump rings hollow. If President Trump is a sincere Christian and the best

president in modern history, then I'm Cleopatra.

Many influential Republican leaders like former Energy Secretary Rick Perry, US senators Ted Cruz and Lindsay Graham, are similarly complicit. When Trump was fighting to win the Republican primary, Perry, Cruz and Graham made incisive, scathing observations of Trump just as Ellis did. Yet, what are we seeing today?

Pretty much the entire Republican Party establishment is playing dead as Trump continues to break all norms. Their silence is acquiescence to monstrous, unprecedented behaviour in the US—or for that matter, any developed Western country.

The media unanimously projected Joe Biden as the president-elect on November 7. It is unprecedented for a losing US presidential candidate to refuse to concede a full 10 days after his loss. Meanwhile, courts have thrown out a slew of frivolous lawsuits. There is no possible way to change the results, but Trump continues to tweet unsubstantiated claims of fraud.

This feels like a banana republic, and could well degenerate into one, no small thanks to Republican enablers who ought to know better. President Trump on November 18 fired Chris Krebs, the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and directly tied it to Krebs' statement that said there "is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised."

As the conservative media echo chamber fans the flames of Trump's false claims of fraud, the damage to the American polity is profound.

A loser's concession is critical to the healing process following an election campaign. Yet Trump's belligerence and his enablers' silence

have resulted in a disquieting refusal of his supporters to accept the people's verdict. According to a new survey from Vox and Data for Progress, 73 percent of likely Republican voters say that the allegations of voter fraud have made them question Joe Biden's victory. Similarly, 75 percent of likely Republican voters said they believed voter fraud took place during the election that benefitted Biden. These findings are similar to a Reuters/Ipsos poll that found that 68 percent of Republican voters think that the election was "rigged" and about half believe that Trump "rightfully won" it.

No wonder Ellis, the attorney from Colorado, remarked on her 2016 Facebook post: "His supporters DON'T CARE about facts or logic. They aren't seeking truth."

So here we are, with America reeling from the double whammy of a pandemic getting scarier by the day and an economic crisis where millions are staring at possible ruin. This is a time when tough choices need to be made, and compromises need to be thrashed out. There's about a snowball's chance in hell of that happening when you have an opposition party hamstrung by a rabid base untethered from fact, policy and logic, run by politicians too pusillanimous, or unprincipled, or both, to take on a former president who is happiest when he can rile up his base and throw a spanner in the works.

It will be the unenviable task of President-elect Joe Biden to rescue America from the greatest crisis in a century in the most hostile political circumstances imaginable. I sure hope you have the luck of the Irish, Mr President-Elect, because you sure as hell are going to need it.

Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for Silicooner, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

QUOTABLE
Quote

VOLTAIRE
(1694-1778)
French philosopher and author.

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Hard stuff
6 Chicago team
11 Book section
12 Snowy bird
13 Precipitous
14 Silly one
15 Angry cat sounds
17 "The Simpsons" bartender
18 Chanting sounds
19 Away from the wind
22 Soup sphere
23 Least strict
24 Chop finely
25 Posture
27 Cubby hole?
30 Baseball's Casey

DOWN
1 Diagonal mover
2 Punctual
3 Black Sea city
4 Last letters
5 Kicking out

31 Oscar winner
32 Groom's garb
33 Catchphrase
35 Sun Valley setting
38 Fuming
39 Ultimate
40 New parent, for example
41 "Cabaret" director
42 Pane material

6 Implore
7 Sense of self
8 Kitchen come-ons
9 Vacation spot
10 Rider's horse
16 Spirit sessions
20 Shining
21 Miniature
24 Supply with staff
25 Painter's place
26 San Antonians, e.g.
27 Explorer Vasco
28 Cheers
29 Frisco team
30 Not flexible
34 Test type
36 Possesses
37 Corrida cry

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11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42

11-14

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

M	A	S	O	N		R	E	C	A	P
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A	L	O	N	E		R	E	E	V	E
T	O	R	T	E		S	P	R	E	E

BEETLE BAILEY
BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES
BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT