

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY FEBRUARY 18, 2021, FALGUN 5, 1427 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



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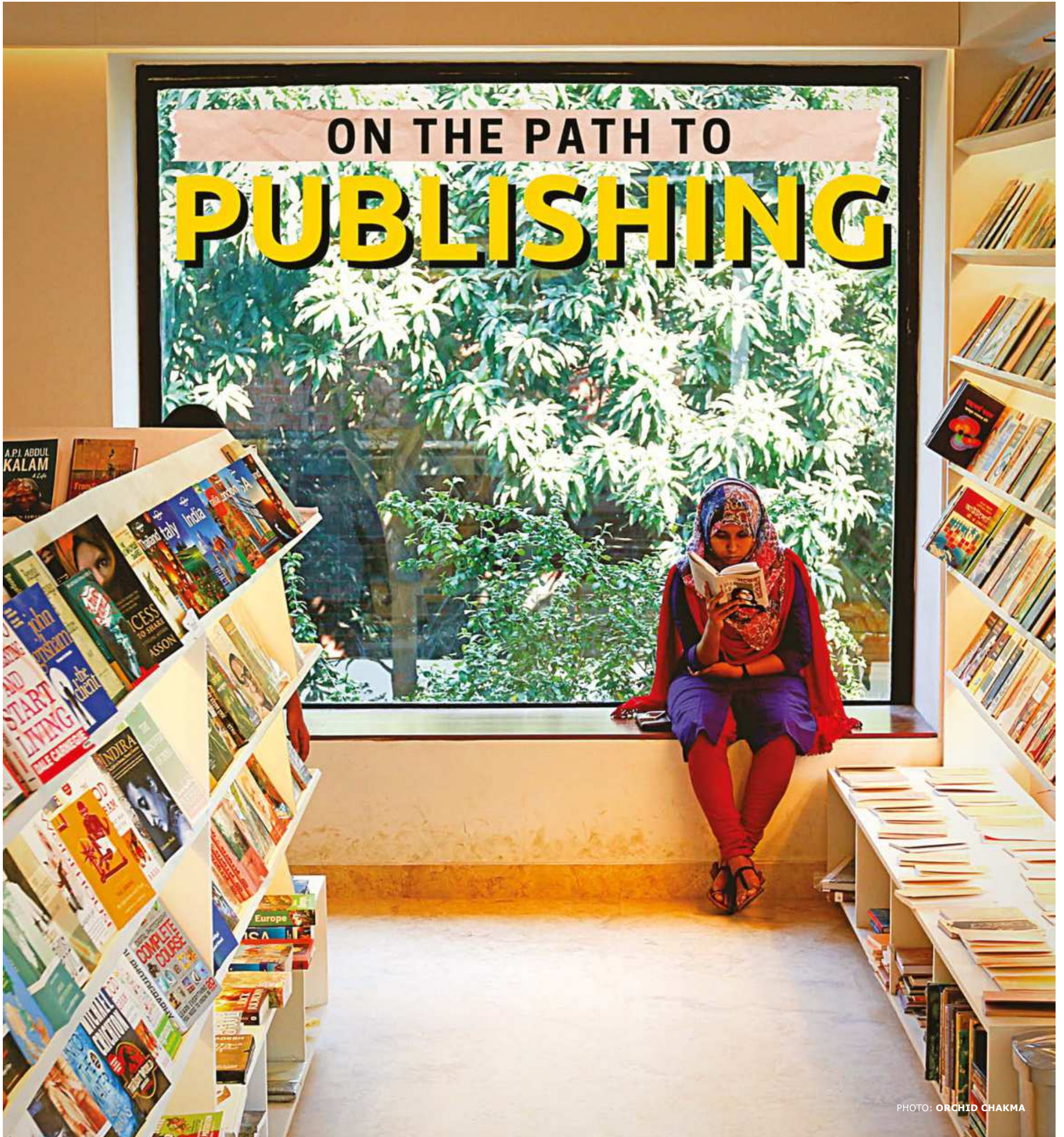


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

EDITORIAL

We can all be really critical of our own work. Writing something of your own can be daunting because you think you can never write as well as some of the other people out there. If you don't know where to start or how to go about it, it can even be frustrating not being able to express yourself the way you intend. Like a 2 year old throwing a crying fit because they can't communicate why they're mad.

Then you finally stumble across a piece of published work that uses the same word 5 times in one paragraph (no, not for dramatic affect either), begins an argument only to quickly abandon it and sprinkles difficult out of context words like acquiesce or quodlibetical to really jazz things up. And you think to yourself, maybe, I too could write.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES



Sandman on Netflix

Finally a reality

AAQIB HASIB

A few weeks ago, and after years, almost decades, of waiting, Netflix officially announced the cast for the upcoming *Sandman* TV series.

The show — adapted from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comic book series, which ran from 1989 to 1996 — will follow the story of Morpheus, The Lord of Dreams. In fact, Morpheus isn't just the lord of dreams, but he is also the anthropomorphic personification of dreams. Throughout the series, we experience Morpheus' interaction with other supernatural characters as he continues to try and maintain balance in "The Dreaming".

Sandman has seen a variety of iterations perpetually stuck in production limbo, with hope for any adaptation ever coming to our screens dwindling with each passing year. Gaiman himself referred to it in multiple interviews as being some sort of "development heck". A little more hopeful than "development hell", but the taste of optimism crushing your soul that much harder.

At one point (around 2013), there was a *Sandman* movie in development, with Joseph Gordon-Levitt as both director and actor. However, that fell apart due to creative differences between Gordon-Levitt and New Line Cinema.

After that, things went radio silent for a while. There were still talks about TV and movie adaptations of something or the other from the *Sandman* universe, but that has persistently existed since the mid-90s with nothing solid to show for. In fact, the movie with Gordon-Levitt is

probably the closest fans ever got to the acclaimed comic book series coming to the big screens.

That is, until this year. Netflix had previously announced back in July 2019 that they were going to be adapting the comic book series into a TV show. However, fans were still sceptical. After all, they had been starved on hope for far too long.

With the announcement of the cast, along with information from Gaiman that shooting was ongoing, it seems that finally *Sandman* is being dreamt into reality.

Gaiman's works have been adapted in a variety of formats. From movies such as *Stardust*, to TV shows like *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Good Omens*, Gaiman's body of work is rather successful irrespective of format, in many cases due to his direct involvement in the creative process as producer or writer.

As a long-time fan, I am more than excited. The casting of Tom Sturridge for Morpheus seems perfect. You would never think about Sturridge off the top of your head, but the choice feels just right. Gwendoline Christie as Lucifer is also a brilliant choice. And I can only look forward to the show's release at this point.

In preparation, I'd recommend everyone to give the comic book a read or listen to the recent Audible series that started last year. Keep your eyes and ears open, as this will definitely be a series to watch out for.

Aaqib is still stuck in December 2019. Send him the details on how to make a time machine to aaqibhasib94@gmail.com



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What is this morbid curiosity?

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

Whenever a fight breaks out in the neighbourhood or each time we pass a serious accident on the road, we all feel a certain urge to sneak a glance. It makes sense because we are eager to know what will happen next.

The curiosity to delve into the situation and the anticipation of the unknown stimulates interest. This is why morbidity, gore, and violence have become such a staple in pop culture. The abundance of grim plotlines and ghastly scenes in TV shows and movies capture a lot of audience attention because of this morbid curiosity. But why?

Morbid curiosity generally refers to interest in all things grisly and grotesque which includes being fascinated with gore, violence, horror, and death. This fascination with the bleak doesn't necessarily mean getting enjoyment from such things because that would be truly problematic. Rather, this feeling mostly stems from the desire to experience fear and suffering without actively participating in dangerous situations. It's true that we are absurdly attracted to highly disturbing things. Our intrigue towards the macabre reflects realism. We imagine us being in the same situation and think to ourselves what we would do if the person suffering was us. This activates the fight or flight response of the brain, releasing certain hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which creates a surge of energy in the body, triggering a well-coveted feeling called empathy.

True crime shows and our seemingly increasing interest in serial killers and criminals imply that we crave to learn from negativity. Heinous offenses like these make us want to know what goes through the minds of these people and help us empathize with the victims. It makes us feel alive and somewhat connected with each other. Dr. Dolf Zillmann's excitation-transfer theory claims that overcoming a negative experience reinforces positive emotions. We live vicariously through these characters because they quench our thirst for knowing what happens when we die.

Morbid curiosity not only makes us go through these sombre feelings, but also gives us a sense of reassurance that we are alive and living. Sometimes watching aggression and violence makes our own anger wear off as if a need inside us has been met. Finishing a horror movie or a disgusting video makes us feel stronger. We get drowned in a feeling of accomplishment that we overcame our fears and did not surrender to our circumstances. All these set off our brain's reward centre, making us feel good.

Overt violence sells. But overexposure to the graphic and gory conditions lead us to think that this is what the normal looks like. Fascination shouldn't reach such heights that it turns into obsession and at a point we become insensitive. While some filmmakers use violence and gore for the sole purpose of sparking cathartic responses, others highlight the tragic reality of violence for people to learn from, rather than gain pleasure from it.

Knowing the unknown isn't bad. But it's up to us where we draw the line.

The F in Farnaz stands for "Farnaz can't write a blurb". Leave her some suggestions at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

Things We Should've Learned at School

BUSHRA ZAMAN

You're not alone if you've looked at someone doing something and wondered, "Why was this not taught at school?" It's time for a reality check -- you're asking the wrong question. You should be asking, what else have I NOT been taught at school but should know?

Education, in my belief, should not solely serve the purpose of helping us find jobs. Here are a few things I wish I were taught in school.

HOW TO HANDLE FINANCES

There is no point in buying 10,000 watermelons like they do in math problems if we don't know how to handle the bills for the 10,000 watermelons. To avoid being cooped up in jail one day on account of being in debt, it would be nice if we were taught how to fix a budget ahead of the month, or year, in order to spend and save accordingly. Even the people in math problems buying thousands of tomatoes or potatoes would not have been able to do so if they were broke before the end of the month due to miscalculation of finances.

EATING ETIQUETTE

Salad forks and dessert forks are apparently two different forks? And then there's the "spork". Holding them properly is hard enough, now I have to know which food is for which fork?

HOW TO PAY TAXES

This is similar to a very boring math class, but one you keep failing on account of having no clue how it is done. Remember kids, not filing your taxes correctly when you're an adult is illegal and could land you in jail.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE STOCK MARKET

So that we can understand any stock market drama without having to Google in order to understand what is going on. It is also necessary since it might inspire others to incorporate this knowledge in their careers, but more so because googling the context can take the fun out of memes.

HOW TO MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS EFFICIENTLY AND PROMPTLY

This might even help solve the age old dilemma of, "What shall I eat today?" and may potentially help sustain friendships and relationships since you won't be constantly switching your order with somebody else's.

HOW TO CONDUCT YOURSELF DURING AN INTERVIEW

Vital, because referring to "How interviews are conducted in movies" are never a good idea. They're scripted!

HOW TO HANDLE REJECTION

If we were taught this, perhaps we would have understood that cutting or dying your hair or making drastic changes to your physical look is not a solution to your problems and would have saved ourselves from plenty of pictures we now have to hide. We would also know how to respond to romantic or other rejections in healthy and non-problematic ways.

BONUS: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING ABLE TO SPEAK IN A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AND BEING INTELLIGENT

It is absurd enough that I am having to explain this, but while multilingual skills are definitely a plus point, it does not mean you're better than others at doing things. If you're bad at something, you'll remain bad at it, just additionally in another language.

What do you wish was taught in school?

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushra-zaman31@yahoo.com



Graphic content

This photo contains sensitive content which some people may find graphic or violent.

Tap to see

UNFOLLOW CELEBRITIES AND CORPORATIONS?

New TikTok trend raises questions

MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

Who are you following on social media? Chances are, alongside your friends and meme pages, your feed plays host to posts by influencers with millions of followers flaunting their OOTD or posing happily with products sent to them for free for promotional purposes.

We give them views, we give them likes and shares and, in the process, we enable them to get away with exploiting a problematic and arguably toxic power structure. However, a new viral TikTok trend is trying to challenge that.

1 Influencers are profiting off of you. Followers are an influencer's bread and butter and by following a person, you increase their social clout, allowing them to capitalise on you. This is a pyramid-shaped marketing scheme. Not dissimilar to asking "What's so wrong with corporations taking my personal information anyway?", one might wonder what's so wrong with allowing influencers to profit off of them.

Celebrities make a ginormous amount of money by making social media posts alone. A recent *MSN News* article reports that the social media mogul sitting at the pinnacle of influencer culture, Kylie Jenner, earns USD 1.2 million for every sponsored Instagram post.

Fox Business reports that the average influencer in the US makes between USD 30,000 to 100,000 per year for promoting products like clothing, food, hotel chains and even vitamin supplements on their pages.

Gina Bologna, whose TikTok video started the mass unfollowing trend said in her video, "I used to work in marketing and I know how much people like Kylie Jenner get paid for having the social media account followings that they have. Unfollow them. Unfollow them all. This world is lacking balance and harmony, the inequality... is greater than it ever has been."

"The media structure has been corporatized, and has not been speaking for the people for quite some time. We deserve to be free people. They have undermined us, they have been bought and sold by corporations — it is no longer the people's interests in mind it is corporations' interests."

It is interesting to note here that just last year several celebrities and influencers, including rapper Cardi B, were given warnings for failing to disclose to their followers that the tea they were flaunting in their posts were a paid promotion, which is important because the drink was making "scientifically dubious claims" about its health benefits.



2 Model, mom and social media aficionado Chrissy Teigen got embroiled in controversy when she inadvertently exposed just how smoothly your career can run if you have social media clout. Professional chef Alison Roman called Teigen out in May 2020 by saying, "She (Teigen) had a successful cookbook. And then it was like: Boom, line at Target. Boom, now she has an Instagram page that has over a million followers where it's just, like, people running a content farm for her. That horrifies me and it's not something that I ever want to do."

While Teigen has a social media following, there are many exemplary professional chefs like Roman who have dedicated their life to the culinary field but will never get product lines or get to capitalise on their culinary skills the way a celebrity like Teigen will. This is a good example of how influencer culture can hijack opportunities from people dedicated to their talents.

3 So, how much power can unfollowing have? Organised protests can do a lot on social media. Closer to home in India, when the untimely death of a talented, superstar actor caused controversy last year and accusations of nepotism, favouritism and grouping were thrown around, industry insiders who the public thought were lacking in their behaviour saw their followers decrease in the hundreds of thousands.

The public isn't a court of law, it's not

about deciding who's guilty. It's about sending them a straight message. And in today's age, unfollowing someone on social media is as direct as a message gets.

The recent GameStop and Reddit phenomenon only proved the power organised and coordinated online movements can have. Like Janis so eloquently explained in *Mean Girls*, "Regina George is an evil dictator. How do you overthrow an evil dictator? You take away her resources. She would be *nothing* without... (her) band of loyal followers."

4 With anything in life, we must ask "What do I gain from this?" Ask yourself why you are following a certain person. Marie Kondo up your newsfeed and question why anyone deserves a spot on it. It is perhaps both a philosophical and a subjective question to ask, "What value does it add to my life?"

For me, if I'm learning something from a content creator, be it cooking, arts and crafts or makeup, that has value. I'm grateful for public figures that are teaching me something. We don't need to unfollow every single account. There are some that inspire you to pursue a certain field and some that are genuinely non problematic and don't capitalise on you.

For Bangladeshi influencers, many shot to popularity on their own merit to do comedy or review food joints in the city. I'm happy to keep them on my feed. Receiving the axe are those who flaunt privileges and do little other than aim to set dubious lifestyle standards. Or worse,

cross content in the name of entertainment. This is particularly problematic because the wealthy and influential have a self-validating seal of approval so whatever they do or wear *becomes* the trend (hence the moniker "influencer", I know).

Bologna said when encouraging the unfollow movement, "Many influencers become influencers because they are already living lavish lives that they see 'worth envying,' meanwhile there are people without their basic needs being met," she wrote. "How can we rationalize giving celebrities USD 30,000 to post a picture of themselves with a product when we can't even feed and house all of our people!?"

And to date, over a thousand people so far have posted videos of them unfollowing celebrities.

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Mrittika Anan Rahman is a daydreamer trying hard not to run into things while walking. Find her at mrittika.anan@gmail.com

On the Path to Publishing

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

In 2018, after she finished writing the manuscript of her first poetry collection, *On Days Like This*, Shaira Afrida Oyshee was fortunate enough to meet writer and critic Syed Manzoorul Islam. Two weeks later, he said he "found it worthwhile". Soon on, her collection was published by Journeyman Books. The success of her debut collection still fresh, her second poetry collection – *All the Quiet Places* – was published by Any-aproakash in 2019.

"I understood that I was surrounded by literature and publishing people and that if I wasn't I would still be where I am, but it would take me at least two more years of dedicatedly searching for a publisher or getting accepted," she says, acknowledging her upbringing in a family active in the literary scene.

About the practical challenges of getting published, Shaira says, "You can drop in your manuscript or email it to the publication houses mentioned above but it takes months to go through the manuscripts that they receive and I have seen books of exceptionally good new writers being published like that. I still felt there could be a better

way to find good poets and give the gift of their poetry to the readers to appreciate." She is the CEO of Dots Publications, an independent publishing house which is slated to bring out its first anthology (*LAMP*) in February 2021. Because of its "Most Promising Poet Award" scheme, the anthology, she says, is an effective tool of finding and rewarding poets with publishing deals.

For Syed Rafid Kabir, author of *The Little Sounds of Time*, publishing his debut novel "felt like a breeze" in comparison to the trials and tribulations of writing the novel, which took him four years. Aside from the actual hard work that goes into writing a novella, one of the biggest challenges he faced was having to type out the entire manuscript (more than 30,000 words) from his notebook in a Word document. *The Little Sounds of Time*, a book about the bizarre nature of time, was published by Worthy Publications in late 2019.

"Publishing a book in Bangladesh is straightforward: if you write a good story, you can be a good author. It's the same for many countries. But selling the book can often be challenging. And that is one of the last struggles I'm dealing with," he says. "I



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

have many other projects on the way; they include reality-bending twists, deserts, deep space, the afterlife, bizarreness of time and so much more!"

Not everyone's road to publishing is smooth, though.

After finishing the first draft of his novel, *Mystika: Might by Steel*, which he started writing in 2017 as "an exercise of passion", Saam Hasan started approaching multiple agents and publishers.

"The biggest issue brought about by the rejections is the uncertainty. Because all you get is a form rejection letter, with no specifics as to where you were lacking. This meant I had no idea if I was getting any closer to catching a break or if my work was so far off the mark that I had no hope," he says, recounting the rejections his novel faced.

In the face of disappointing replies, he had "abandoned" his novel for a temporary period to focus on other projects. But after mid-2018, as he stumbled across Worthy Publications for one of those projects, the people engaged with the publishing house opened his eyes to a new way of publishing *Mystika*: "a self-publishing plan".

"I was introduced properly to the world of self-publishing. In particular, I understood the idea of on-demand publishing services where you don't have to pay for a certain number of initial copies to be printed. In these schemes, all that an author must pay for are accessory costs such as purchasing an ISBN, the cover design, any editing services, any marketing plans, etc. The cost of printing a book is simply deducted from the price of the book that the author sets, once a customer places an order. In other words, it is possible to get published without significant investment," he says about the experience.

In August 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic, *Mystika: Might by Steel* was self-published. It is now available on Amazon.

Aside from poetry, novels, and novellas, comics are not unfortunately considered "a serious form of literature" by mainstream publishers, as per Fahim Anzoom Rummam, illustrator and author of *Nidranogor*.

"Getting published is the first problem I faced," he says, "In general, there's a dearth of English language publishers compared to Bangla, and you can see how I imme-

diately fell into an uneasy corner as I had to find a publisher who would publish in English and also be interested in publishing comics."

Another problem he faced was the sheer amount of time he had to give to a certain publishing house. He says he had to see *Nidranogor* get published a year after completion because that publishing house, which he didn't go ahead with, chose to reply so late.

Moreover, he is also having to deal with payment issues because he is entitled to only a tenth of the total revenue. "It boils down to really little money," he says.

For Saleh Fuad, a writer and translator, the challenge of publishing rested more on the potential areas of controversy regarding censorship than on the trials and tribulations of finding a publishing house. His first book – *Salman Rushdie O Michhler Rajneeti*, published in 2017 – is the translation of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's original text. One of the world's "500 most influential Muslims", Khan is a controversial figure in countries like Bangladesh due to his opposing and liberal views on many aspects.

"I was lucky that Chaitanya Prokashoni chose to give my book the green signal," he says. "Even though the atmosphere was loaded with censorship-related anxiety, I was surprised to see how quickly it sold out at the fair."

He reveals that as a newcomer and a young writer in undergraduate years, it was intimidating for him to attract the unwanted, discomforting attention from certain religious circles owing to the book's contents.

"Other than these, I didn't face more problems, thankfully."

Even though the terrain of publishing remains very uneasy and the experiences vary from one individual to the next, as the founder of a publishing house, Shaira thinks that devoting oneself to the art is one of the most important ways of navigating the industry.

She says, "Perfecting your craft by learning from every resource available then forming your own style is the first task in hand. Then comes finding a publisher, but if you do the first task perfectly, speaking from experience, publishers may find you yourselves."

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi is a writer and studies *International Relations*.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

DPS STS SCHOOL DHAKA

A Decade of Excellence in Bangladesh

A CORRESPONDENT

DPS STS School Dhaka was established by STS Group, one of the high-ranking corporate houses in Bangladesh, with a vision to provide globally benchmarked quality education. It is a school set up in collaboration with the internationally renowned Delhi Public School Society (DPSS), an institution which has grown to over 200 schools in 13 countries since 1949. Since its inception in 2009, DPS STS School Dhaka has concentrated on bringing innovation in teaching and learning systems, focusing on the diverse aspects of education.

To ensure a global standard in education, the school follows the entire set of Cambridge International Curriculum from Primary School to Grade 12. Students appear for Cambridge Checkpoint Examinations after completion of Grade 5 and Grade 8. After completing Grade 10, students sit for the Cambridge IGCSE Board Examinations. They appear for the Cambridge AS and A Level examinations after completing Grades 11 and 12 respectively. DPS STS School Dhaka is a Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) affiliated school.

DPS STS School is also a partner school of the British Council Dhaka. Both the campuses of the school are British Council affiliated venues for Cambridge and Edexcel exams. It is a venue for Cambridge Teachers training as well. Additionally, it is also an IELTS exam venue for its students. The school is concerned with benefitting the pupils and engages with the local curriculum – offering study materials to Grades 1 to 10 which covers Mathematics, Bangla, Information Technology, and Bangladesh Studies.

Co-curricular activities are an important part of the school years where students can get the best opportunities to explore new ideas and activities. DPS STS School excels in this area: the school conducts musical, art and dance competitions regularly. Students take part in various inter-school programmes as well. Alongside cultural activities, the school also organises several kinds of sporting events such as cricket, football, chess, swimming, basketball, volleyball, badminton, karate and gymnastics. Students from the school regularly share the winning podium in sports and other extracurricular events across Dhaka.

DPS STS School Dhaka also runs various clubs and holds educational trips. As part of learning beyond the book, a class of 35 students from Grade 6 to 10 made a memorable study tour to the NASA - Kennedy Space Centre in Orlando, USA in 2011, the first Bangladeshi school to visit there.

One of the school's hallmarks is the dedicated Pastoral Care unit. Students' wellbeing is a top

priority of DPS STS School, and the Pastoral Care unit exclusively caters to the child's social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development. Trained counsellors record the personal qualities of students through proficient application of scientific and statistical processes. This is facilitated with the instruments that are available at the school – clubs, activities, volunteer programmes, sports, arts, and other competitions.

The school not only ensures that students' transition into global citizens and international contributors, but also that they serve their community, country, and the environment. Students participate in different kinds of community service programmes that the school organises with a passion for the benefit of the community. The school encourages awareness and has many community service-based activities like tree plantation programmes, fire safety workshops, distribution of winter clothes, books, stationery items, and other materials to the underprivileged. One of the major initiatives is the "DPS STS Education for Human Greatness" where DPS STS students provide free education to spread the light of literacy among the underprivileged. The Social and Welfare Club of the school regularly arrange cleanliness programmes like "Clean Dhaka Campaign" and "Save the Earth". The school also has an awareness-raising club "TEAM" (Teaching Ethics, Awareness, and Morality) to raise cognizance within the school on issues prevalent in our society.

DPS STS School Dhaka has been offering the Duke of Edinburgh International Award Programme to the Students of Grade 8 to 12 since 2014, and so far, 559 students have enrolled in various levels of the award from the institution. They have been certified by the Duke of Edinburgh International Award Programme Bangladesh in Bronze, Silver and Gold Levels.

DPS STS School provides award-winning online education through its virtual classroom programmes. The school conducts regular live classes for all students, supervised by experienced teachers who give individual attention to all participants. These online classes, which consist of regular activities, assignments and feedback, utilise contemporary technology and make learning an exciting and interactive process. At DPS STS, online learning comprises different educational strategies that are aimed to facilitate children's inherent curiosity. The school provides augmented reality tools, virtual labs, breakout rooms, state-of-the-art assessment tools etc. The school is concerned with focusing on every student

as a unique and an individual learner, and thus, online classes are designed to let their unique personalities shine. DPS STS School Dhaka has also organised a host of various online activities, which include music, art, dance and sports activities regularly. These exciting events push the boundaries for what a virtual class can be, and students enjoy learning through creativity while collaborating and competing with one another. For the school's excellence in creating online programmes, exceptional strategic thinking, development in e-learning and uninterrupted shift to virtual classes, DPS STS School Dhaka has been awarded the prestigious "Online Learning Strategy Award" in the internationally renowned BETT MEA Awards 2020.

The institution has obtained remarkable achievements in the arena of academic excellence since its formation. Scholars from the school represented Bangladesh at the World Scholar's Cup (WSC) Beijing Global Rounds 2019. They have made their way to the Tournament of Champions, which is the final round of this worldwide programme, held at Yale University, USA. The school is well known for its career and college counselling – where the school offers extensive services, all senior students receive personalised attention from their guidance counsellors. DPS STS student advocates work closely with students and parents to assist in choosing careers, subject selection, internships, summer programmes, university admission processes and to sharpen students' soft skills. Many DPS STS graduates enrol in renowned Bachelor's programmes globally.

As a befitting stamp to the school's outstanding academic focus, students from the school regularly get recognised as world toppers in various subjects. The noteworthy achievements are: Outstanding Cambridge Learners Award, Cambridge Assessment Education Award, Cambridge Award for International AS Level (top in the World; top in the Country), IGCSE (top in the World; top in the Country), The Daily Star Award (IGCSE, A Level), O Level (top in the Country) and so on.

Recognising the excellence of DPS STS School's academic standards, a number of prestigious universities from USA, Canada, UK, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Australia and more have offered a range of scholarships for the school's students. It is for these many reasons DPS STS School has covered much ground in the field of education and instruction in Bangladesh. It is the vision of DPS STS School to be the best for its students and to be the leader in modern education in Bangladesh and beyond.





PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

BEAUTY IN LITTLE THINGS

CHARUSHILA BHASWATI

"Feluda?"

"Yes, Feluda."

Mrinmoy looked at his wife with amusement. He was trying to figure out why she suddenly brought it up at 3 in the morning.

He cleared his throat and asked, "Madam, would you kindly tell me which direction your train of thought is taking you now?"

Arpita slowly turned her face towards him while lowering her gaze. She would often do that when she felt vulnerable. She said, "When I was little, I always thought if I was ever given a chance to live out life as a character from a book, I'd choose to live the life of Feluda."

"That's it? Your expressions made me feel like you were going to say something like I lied about you being my only love, Mrinmoy. It's always been Feluda!"

Then he burst into laughter.

"You always have to be sarcastic, huh?" She gave a little nudge on his tummy and turned her face away from him.

Mrinmoy knew how his wife was irritated but also that she didn't mind getting teased by him a little.

She didn't have to turn her face now. Mrinmoy rolled to her side and wrapped his arms around her tight. Arpita smiled at the calmness she felt. He was her refuge whenever she felt a storm brewing inside her.

"So, why did you wish to be Feluda?"

"You see, Feluda never struggled to regain his composure in whatever situation he might be in. He was always so certain about every decision he had to make. I won't deny that he did face quite a lot of dangerous situations, but he won each and every battle. He didn't worry much and travelled around the country with Topshe and Jatayu whenever he wanted. His life was so full of thrills."

Mrinmoy listened to her with thoughtful attention.

"You know, when you were telling me all this, I was picturing the little Arpita lost in the adventures of Feluda," he said affectionately.

"It's always been my desire, but now as I am living this life with you, I realize life isn't thrilling or fulfilling because of the action-packed events. This moment right now is not less than a dream for me. Look! I am with the love of my life, under the blissful stars around the glimmer of

this moon. I am sharing what I have in my heart, no matter how silly it might be. You are giving me not just a heart that listens to me, but a heart that fills me with such immense love and gratitude. It gives me a far greater feel of freedom and peace than imagining my life as Feluda. As I will close my eyes tonight, I will not be distressed. Because I will be falling asleep listening to your heartbeat which is more melodious than any lullaby in this world. If our life is exactly like this for the next 40 years, I won't get tired of us. These little things add up each day to something more and make me feel so alive from the inside. Any place becomes heaven living by your side."

Arpita and Mrinmoy both had tears in their eyes.

A teardrop fell over Arpita's cheeks.

"You are crying, Mrinmoy? Hey, come here."

She got up and held his face in her hands. Mrinmoy felt himself sinking into the warmth of them. He kept his face on top of her chest while she pulled him as close as she could. In his dulcet voice, he softly said, "Not just this night, but the sun that will rise and bring us the morning tomorrow, it will last longer in

me than any mornings I've spent before. I won't wake up alone, you'll be the first face I see. You'll be the first touch I feel. I'll wish to spend the time in bed with you just a bit longer each day before we have to get up. I'll feel love in the cup of tea that we'll share every day of our lives. Well, it doesn't matter if the tea isn't perfect every day!"

Mrinmoy winked at her teasingly.

"You'll have to finish it no matter how dull the taste is, okay?" Arpita shot him a playful smile.

They fell asleep inside each other's arms in the shelter of bliss and unconditional love. Little did they know that their first night together would be the last night of their lives – that the scarlet flames would eat up their dreams alive and burn them to ashes.

But the fire didn't know that their love wouldn't go up in smoke. Mrinmoy and Arpita would not let their hopes die even when they burned together.

Mrinmoy would still say, "Don't be afraid my love, not even death could do us part."

Their souls would soon mesh into one another and turn as one. Wandering among the stars, they would reminisce about the little things they loved.

"Bom Dia!" from the east coast of Africa

FARAZ E ISLAM

The name Mozambique comes from an Arab trader, Mussa Bin Bique, who first visited the country around the time of Vasco da Gama. It was July 2016 and I was moving from Dhaka to Maputo, Mozambique. That was the moment we embarked on the most unique adventure of our lives.

Exiting the airport gates, it felt like a different world. At first glance, there was the stunning blue sky, unrivalled by any other sky I've ever seen. The fresh, clean air and the light breeze from the Indian Ocean running through my hair. It was crazy to think this would be the place I would call home for the next three years. Maputo was such a unique place with amazing food inspired by the Portuguese, South African, and Indian cuisine. Driving through this coastal city, you can still see the architecture from the Portuguese era. Mozambicans are very warm and hospitable and will always greet you with a smiling "bom dia" (good day).

Mozambique was where I became aware of conservation issues. I learned about the devastating effects of climate change and the simple choices that we can make for



PHOTO: SHIHAB ANSARI AZHAR

a big impact. How the material of your soda bottle, be it glass or plastic, affects the ocean. Maputo being right on the coast, the bay was heavily overfished and the lives of the local fishermen got harder and harder. I also strove to find solutions. With friends, we sold plastic to a company that recycles it into furniture and we used the

money from that to donate to a local soup kitchen to help the hungry.

I went on safaris and saw amazing animals, from the majestic lions and the abundant zebras to the giant elephants and rare rhinos. Once after sunset, when we were driving, a lone elephant approached us out of nowhere and our vehicle skidded

to a stop. Upon seeing the elephant, fear had grasped me for a second before sheer wonder and respect settled in at the beautiful creature before me. Our guide whispered, "Don't be scared. They are more afraid of you than you are of them." That was such a touching moment for me. How could these giant animals be afraid of us? What could we as humans have done to cause this? The answer is saddening. An estimated one hundred elephants are killed every single day. We stared in awe at these beautiful animals, looking so dignified where they're meant to be, in the wild where they belong and not in zoos for human entertainment.

From our stay, I have learned that there are so many things that we have yet to learn, how diverse and magical the world actually is, and that we have urgent environmental problems that we must work together to match with solutions. I was incredibly sad to leave Africa behind but I was equally excited to meet the new adventures that our new home would bring. My time in Mozambique was truly a memorable one.

The writer is a grade 8 student at British International School Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

The Prejudice Against Black Pets

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

As dramatic as it sounds, but there's literally a cat living on the fifth floor of a building right next to ours, all alone. The building isn't finished yet as its construction stopped midway, and a mother cat lives there because we feed her. I, along with my family, am absolutely drawn to the cat and whenever we talk about it to some people, they find it amusing too until they see the cat. Why?

Because the cat is black. Prejudice against black animals and choosing them as pets have been prevalent for a long time, so much so, that we often can't even pinpoint it.

The colour of the fur of an animal plays a huge role when they are picked as pets. When it comes to cats, most of the people steer clear from black ones due to the superstition that they bring bad luck and are connected to witchcraft and evilness. Aside from that, people hold a misbelief that black cats are more aggressive and are not well behaved.

All these wrong ideas lead them to barely opting for black cats as pets, or even generally adoring them. And when they are taken as pets, some people will even see it as a disgrace and try to criticise it.

Medha Tarannum, 18, shares her experience, "I had adopted Kale when he was a baby. I was afraid to bring him home at first. With time, however, my parents started liking him but even then whenever any relative would come over, they would repeatedly criticise me for choosing Kale."

Rifah Nanjiba, first year student at North South University, tells us the same about her pet rabbits, adding how the negative behaviour shown towards animals affects them. "Among my four bunnies, there's a black one: Phoebe. I adore her just the same as the other three. But whenever my friends or family come over, they adore the white ones and ask me with disgust why I picked the black one too and pass negative comments about her. It breaks my heart since after they've shoved her off, it takes a lot of time for Phoebe



PHOTO: @JJI.ONTHEBEAT

to become normal," she shares. A lot of time people even think that black pets are less photogenic and don't go for adopting them.

With people being aware of colourism now and coming forward to uprooting it from society, it's also important to identify this aspect of colourism shown towards animals and trying to break through the barriers of adopting black pets.

Stories like that of fellow SHOUT writer Fatima Jahan

Ena's little gorgeous cat Jiji show that people are slowly but surely coming across the opposite side of the spectrum too. "Whenever I post pictures of Jiji on my Instagram, people always appreciate him. Even when people come over, after they are past the initial dismay of his black fur, they actually say he is cool like a little panther," Ena tells us. "And that sort of mentality is really important for us to break the stereotypes and adopt black pets and love all animals in general."