

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 22, 2021, BAISHAKH 9, 1428 BS

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Oops sorry, just sowed the seeds of revolution in the name of entertainment

THE QUINTESSENCE OF
MARXISM CAPTURED IN
BANGLA MOVIES

PG 3

LOOKING FOR THE
FEMALE GAZE

PG 4

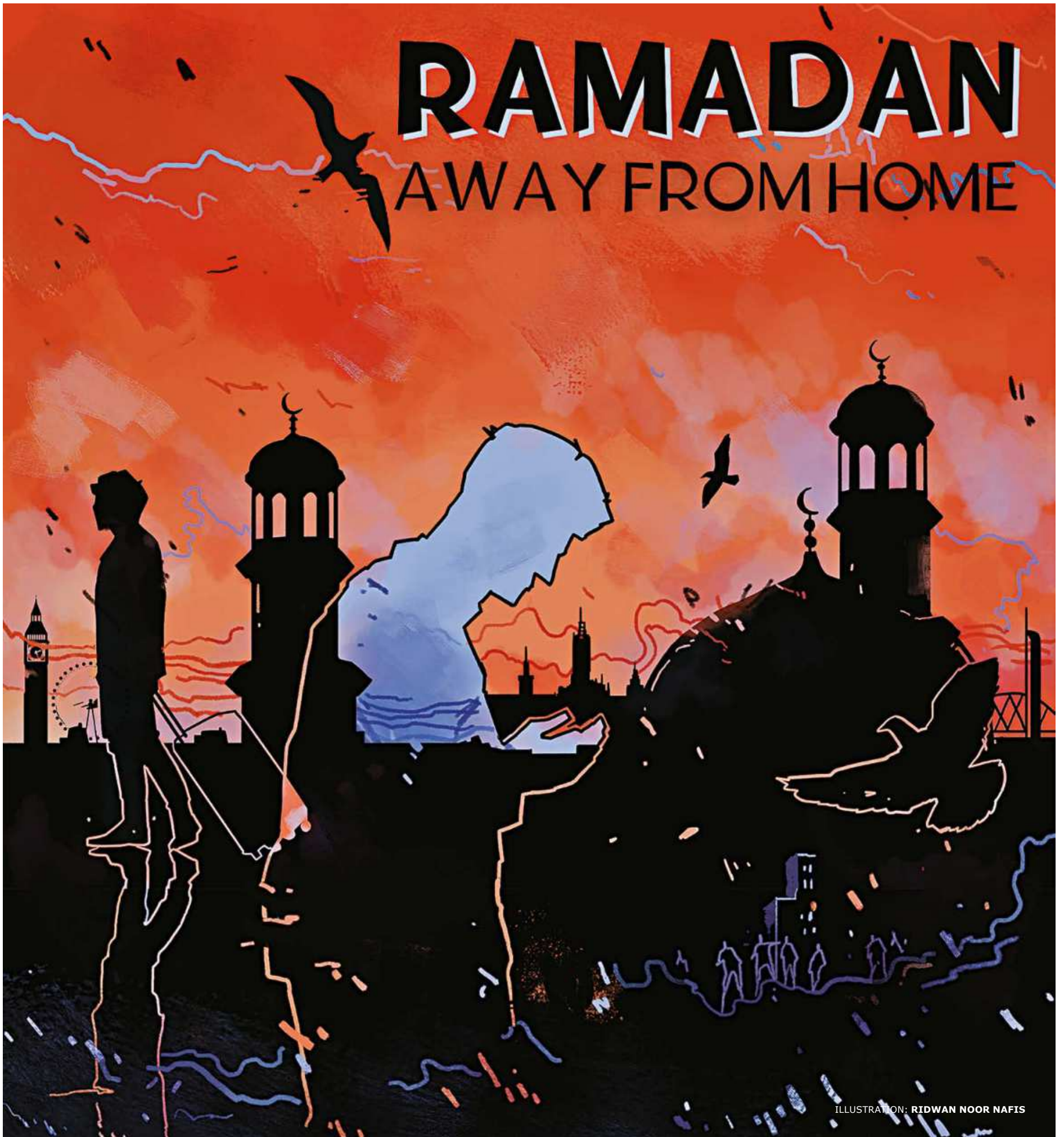


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

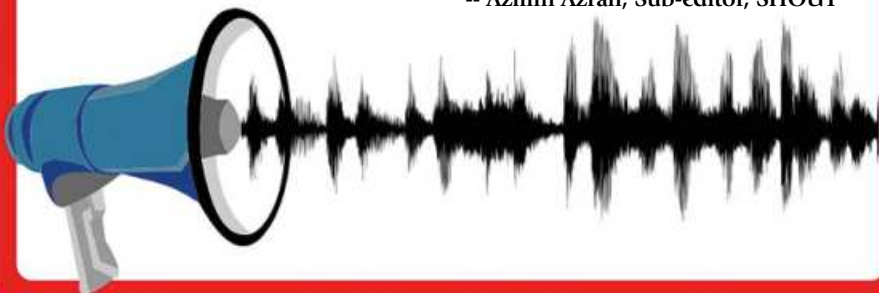
EDITORIAL

A Ramadan under lockdown is not something I'll ever get used to. The lack of human interaction, the absence of communal iftars, the *taraweeh* at home and the general dearth of festivity during what is normally the most festive time of the year felt like a nightmare when it happened last year, and it still feels that way. What's worse is that if we don't maintain this lockdown, the same could happen to Eid this year! And I am not a man who's going to be okay with three consecutive Eids spent at home. It just doesn't sit right.

I do consider myself lucky in many ways, however. At least I am home with my family, in good-ish health. Thinking of those who have to live abroad without family, who are having to spend Ramadan truly alone, fills me with great sympathy.

And then there are people who have to observe Ramadan in financial distress, whose employers deny them their fair wages, who are denied their right to getting time off for iftar, or even their basic need of clean toilets. These are the people I feel truly sorry for, a feeling only surpassed by my disgust at the system that allows these problems to exist.

-- Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT





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PLAYWATCH

GAME REVIEW



From Hell and Back

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Hades by Supergiant Games is a rogue-like RPG that takes the concept of games set in the Greek Underworld and completely reinvents it. The story follows Zagreus in his attempts to escape from the Underworld while gaining support from his relatives the Olympian gods, and some other well-known characters from the Greek mythos.

The mechanics of the game are quite simple as it is a hack-and-slash combat system using available weapons. The most prominent feature of the game would be its looping system. Since the objective of the game is to travel as far as you can, dying means that you must start the game from the very first checkpoint. Although it sounds incredibly frustrating (it is), the game takes the looping system and elevates it to a whole new level. The game expects you to fail multiple times. Beginning the game again allows the player to alter and improve Zagreus' abilities to ensure smoother sailing the next time you start.

The game also takes the inescapable aspect of the Underworld and uses it to its advantage. Each time you restart, the chambers leading up to the escape route changes. This means that it is quite difficult or even impossible to guess which chambers or variants of bosses will await you.

Apart from the abilities and the route-changing system, the game also introduces new characters, dialogues, story arcs, etc. each time the player restarts. This is the game's secret weapon in my opinion. Alongside the world-building, the character designs and voice-acting in the game are gorgeous. If you are a fan of Greek mythology like me, you will definitely enjoy the studio's audio-visual interpretation of each Greek god and their unique offerings. Furthermore, players also unlock story arcs if they happen to meet specific characters on Zagreus' journey.

Lastly, the music. The soundtrack composed by Darren Korb seems like a match made in heaven for the game. The music, which can be described as rock ballads for the Underworld, goes perfectly with the pacing of each chamber in the game. I have played the game for over fifty hours and I can personally vouch that the music does not get tiresome over time.

All in all, *Hades* is a masterfully created game that almost anyone can appreciate to some degree to another. If not for the actual gameplay, the music, art, visuals, and voice-acting are sure to garner praises from fans and non-fans alike.

Fatima Jahan Ena likes complaining about capitalism and her forehead. Find her at mail2ena@gmail.com

OPINION



ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

The Need to Revise How Gender-based Violence is Reported

RAISA CHOWDHURY

With the high court order to stop media outlets from disclosing the identities of rape victims making news, it is a good time to reflect on how gender-based violence has been reported for decades now, without much change. By skimming through the headlines of any newspaper on any given day, one can easily draw a clear distinction between the ways in which violence against women is reported in contrast to other crimes.

WHERE IS THE ISSUE?

The problem lies in the use of passive voice to report such atrocities; it has become a norm to outline the incidents in a way that makes the victims of violence the subject of the narration. It is rather typical to see headlines which go, “woman raped/harassed in (insert location),” often without any mention of the perpetrator (unless they’re someone close to the victim). This passivity is not just limited to the headlines, but is found all throughout the account — the articles are structured in a way that puts more focus on the background, family, whereabouts, and other details of the victims’ life more than those of the assaulters. In doing so, these articles paint a clearer picture of the devastated state of the victims than that of the monstrosity of the rapists’ actions. While this may not seem problematic at first thought, we need to remind ourselves how important tone truly is — especially for platforms that have the ability to influence the minds of hundreds of thousands of readers.

EFFECT ON READERS

While some might argue that such a focus is put on the victims to induce empathy

among readers, it is imperative to consider the downside which might be outweighing the positive effects. In Bangladesh, where victim-blaming is a deep-seated problem, it is necessary to shift the focus away from the victims, more so towards the perpetrators. When continuously bombarded with headlines that focus on the victims more than their abusers, public reaction inclines towards sympathy rather than anger. But right now, we need rage more than sympathy. Besides, in a society like ours where being assaulted against is still equated with a loss of honour, the looming fear of being identified publicly makes it harder for victims to come forward with their stories to take legal action.

DOES THE HIGH COURT ORDER CHANGE MUCH?

Although an important step towards ending the tendency of the media to report violence against women passively, it is not enough to bring substantial change. Following this order, news outlets may stop disclosing the victims’ identity, but the tone is likely to remain the same. Given that, it is imperative to call on journalists to turn the tide now more than ever. The shift in voice could truly prove to be effective in not only changing the course of public dialogue on gender-based violence, but also give victims of assault and rape more space to speak up.

In 2021, the bar for journalism in this regard must be set higher, and that could easily begin with more headlines that say: “man raped/harassed woman in (insert location)”

After all, why should rapists not be the subject and focal point of attention for a crime they committed?

The Quintessence of Marxism Captured in Bangla Movies

JANNATUL FERDOUS

Many a Friday afternoon has seen my sister and I lounging on our couch, remote in hand, surfing through channels to find something watchable, only to settle for the options in Bangla cinema, mindless entertainment at its best.

There is a lot of Bangla cinema on local channels, especially during afternoons, and all day long on Fridays. After flipping through several of these however, realisation dawns, and you recognise that maybe it’s not so mindless after all. You want drama, action, romance, powerful social commentary? Not only do old school Bangla movies have your back, but they have also assumed the responsibility of edification for the masses, which leads me to believe that Bangla movies – at a second glance – are inherently Marxist.

Now, Marxism is an ideology most people are well-acquainted with. But just for the sake of hitting refresh, in the simplest of terms, Marxism deals with class conflict, social hierarchy, and the severely unequal distribution of wealth that is prevalent in our society. It is a political, social, and economic theory in the namesake of German philosopher Karl Marx. At the heart of this ideology is the objective to abolish the division of classes, eradicate the exploitation of the working class and overturning the capitalist regime. All of which, apparently, happens to be the prerequisite to writing a script for Bangla films.

Think about it, the *borolok*, aka the bourgeoisie, and the *gorib*, aka the proletariat, locked in an eternal battle of heroism and villainy. The rich are, without fail, evil, narcissistic, and arrogant to the core, taking advantage of and looking down at the poor from their duplex mansions, sneering in their glitzy typecast rich people attire. While the poor, religiously bearing hearts of gold, immersed in tragedy but eternally *hashi-mukh* (always smiling), despite the hard work they endure on a daily basis, not to mention their iron-clad sense of dignity. In spite of the extreme depictions of the social classes, the idea itself is transparent; the rich are ruthless and care for no one but themselves, and the poor scrape by on crumbs. Insert plot twist no one saw coming, at all: *Borolok* and *Gorib* fall in love (gasp!).

Thus begins a chain of events that eventually brings forth the downfall of the rich. Capitalist villains sit around long tables discussing business and shares and flaunting their billions while the outspoken *rickshawala*’s son woos their spoiled daughter, who overcomes her selfish ways in due time. The climax of these movies portrays the hero, spokesperson of the poor, down-trodden, and alienated, single-handedly defending his honour and the collective worth of the whole working class, symbolising the rise of the proletariat, shaking the superstructure that allows the rich to inadvertently win. Thereby, conveying with every over-zealous *thwack* of his punches, the fact that the upper social class does not get to call the shots anymore.

The happy ending arrives with an overbearing amount of cheese wherein the rich are humbled and the solidarity of the poor prevail. But the nexus of the plot remains the same; eat the rich. Say what you will about the abundance of over-dramatisation of normal events, the hysterical song and dance numbers, and the stomach-ache inducing romance sequences, but Bangla films are a paragon of Marxist ideology. Whether or not they meant it to be caricatured, is another story.

Jannat is too busy romanticizing academics to actually finish assignments. Knock some sense into her at: jannatferdous.xcvii@gmail.com

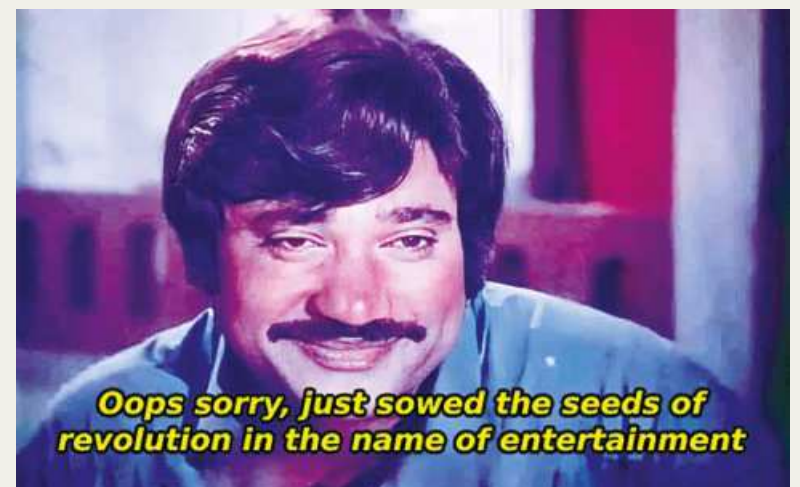




ILLUSTRATION: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

LOOKING FOR THE FEMALE GAZE

NASHRAH HAQUE

What is the male gaze? In film, it is used as a tool to objectify female characters. But, more significantly, it reaffirms the patriarchy's ability to use women as props in the service of the male narrative.

We grew up watching films told from the male perspective, consuming stories told from the male gaze, empathising with these characters in works even though the works are not often told from our perspective. We were taught at a young age to accept men's desires as the societal norm, and women as 'the other'. To put it another way, we've all been conditioned to adopt the male gaze as a result of how conventional cinema has "raised" us.

The concept of the male gaze was first coined by Laura Mulvey, filmmaker and theorist, in the 1970s. According to Mulvey, "under the male gaze, the woman becomes the bearer of meaning rather than the creator of meaning." In other words, she was discussing how our society is structured by and for the benefit of the patriarchy, and how the male gaze makes women passive objects rather than an active subject.

The male gaze can be recognized in film by the following components: placement of the camera, placement of the audience as it watches and the characters' interactions.

The placement of the camera is important in how female characters are interpreted and portrayed. An example of this can be seen in the movie *Bombshell* (2019), which is about multiple female media workers who come forward to reveal how they've been sexually harassed.

In one of the scenes, we see one of the main characters Kayla at an interview, where she gets harassed by her potential boss. Instead of positioning the camera in a way which would have us identify with the victim, focusing on making the audience understand the victim's trauma, it is framed in such a way that has us watching from the predator's eyes instead.

Often in movies, female characters are needlessly sexualised and wear far less clothing than the men, even though the



plot doesn't warrant this (think a female vs male superhero) and the camera has a tendency of focusing on and displaying the female body in details while it doesn't do the same for men. *Suicide Squad* (2016) was directed by a man while *Birds of Prey: Harley Quinn* (2020) by a woman. The first sexualises Margot Robbie's character needlessly through the pullable-length pigtailed hair, aggressively torn clothing, and the camera focusing on her body, while the latter has more authentic-looking hair and bodily proportions and focuses kindly on her face.

Even if the characters in the film are portrayed by women, they are there to serve the male protagonist's story. This in turn causes the "masculinisation" of the audience, regardless of the gender. In the movie *Aladdin* (2019), despite the fact that in the recent adaptations, Jasmine has her own ambitions and stands up for herself in the film, she is always objectified by the story and every man in it. To her father, she is seen as a valuable artifact that must be kept secure. To the villain, an asset that must be gained in order to gain more strength and

workplace.

Another prime example is Jo's classic monologue in *Little Women* (2019). We can see from the scene that she is left looking for meaning in a world that demeans and devalues women, while also struggling with the fact that she wishes to find a partner. The delivery illustrates the third point perfectly and allows us to experience a world of emotions in only a matter of seconds.

"I just feel like women, they have minds and they have souls, as well as just hearts, and they've got ambition and they've got talent, as well as just beauty," she says.

The movie *Promising Young Woman* (2020), is also an excellent example of the female gaze. It explores male privilege and female rage from a female's point of view. This shift viewpoint gives us a unique take on the subject explored in the film. It begs the question: how can a woman survive in a world where a woman's potential is routinely and carelessly sacrificed in the name of male privilege?

The director juxtaposes the lead character's own perspective with the opinions of those around her, whether they see her as a woman from the male perspective or as a woman on the hunt for revenge through the eyes of the audience. It's not just a clever writing strategy to frame the protagonist in enticing tones of intrigue, but it also encourages the audience to think twice about the main character Cassie's intentions.

Feminine stories that value feminine gaze don't only challenge the audience but also the message of the story. It reveals them for what they are – thinking individuals capable of scrutinising the world in the same way as the world can scrutinize them.

The aim of the female gaze is to make the audience feel women's needs and desires; to make women the protagonists of their own stories, independent of any male hero. It aims to subvert the patriarchy's ability to use women as props in the service of the male narrative.

All Nashrah cares about is smashing the patriarchy. Help her at nashrah.haque01@gmail.com

RAMADAN AWAY FROM HOME

BUSHRA ZAMAN

Whether it is in terms of the general festive spirit, *dawaats* at your favourite cousin's place, people brushing up on their cooking skills at home, office goers rushing out of work to go have iftar with their families, or lights being on in homes at 3 AM, Ramadan is one of the busiest months of the year in our country.

However, how is the experience for young people who have moved abroad?

The experience can best be stated by those who have gone through it; a detailed account comes from Mohammed Mehedi Hassan, 28, studying at the University of Dusseldorf, Germany. "The first few days were tough as it was in the summer and the sun goes down pretty late here. I had to fast for about 19 or more hours per day, attend classes, prepare for my exams, and assignments; you can't really focus well when you are hungry and after you break your fast at 9:30 PM in the night, you're tired."

Mehedi goes on to describe how he managed to do food prep. "I cooked right after coming home from a lecture. I would eat a small portion to break my fast, pray Maghrib, and then eat the rest. Leftovers were for both dinner and sehri, because the time between iftar and sehri is not that much." As for prayers? He stated he prayed regularly, adding, "The only time it was a bit troublesome was during the praying time of Isha and Fajr. Isha starts

from midnight and Fajr is around 3 AM, so it was difficult to get enough sleep but was still manageable."

Comparing his still-fresh memories of Ramadan back home to the present days, Mehedi said, "For sure, coming over here changed the scenario for me in Ramadan. Back at home, you fry different food, cut different fruits and some days there are special dishes like *biryani*, grilled chicken or *kabab*. Most importantly you have your family beside you to break your fast with, no matter what is on the menu. After coming here, you just break your fast alone. My mother is not here to pamper me with different dishes, my sister doesn't remind me every minute that I shouldn't sleep right before breaking my fast. You don't get to eat *peyajju* or *beguni*. It's not like you can't make them, it's just you are alone and after you have a long tiring day, you don't feel like making different types of food."

Mehedi also describes his hopes for changes in the pandemic, "In the pandemic everyone has limited work and some have to do home office, so this might buy us some free time when we can cook, but on the other hand, I might not get to pray the Eid *namaaz* in a *jamaat*, because of restrictions."

Studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, *Rifat Zaman, 21, compared his experiences. "Living abroad brought with it changes to my lifestyle, but I never quite expected Ramadan to be close to



Homemade jilapi in the USA

the epicentre of it. Back home, Ramadan meant three things to me: good food, having an excuse to get out of bed late, and whining about how hungry I was to my family. But in Hong Kong the situation was different. Office staff would regularly have meals together, which ramped up the difficulty of fasting, but the sudden respect and admiration I would receive from my co-workers for being able to fast for so long did make the experience worthwhile."

*Rifat continues his comparison but this time adds how his praying habits changed. "Back home, I would only go to mosques for *taraweeh* prayers, but in Hong Kong, I had more reasons to go. The mosque became a symbol of community, of being around people similar to me, so I'd often hop on the train to the nearest mosque after work. Iftar was served and the whole communal experience was something I appreciated very much."

He explained what he felt was the most noticeable difference. "The biggest difference was really just the lack of 'people' for the experience. Back home, I had my family, but with how small and sparsely populated the Muslim community in Hong Kong is, I'd rarely, if ever, meet another Muslim outside the mosque."

*Sabah Shabab, 22, recalls how it felt spending Ramadan without family in Malaysia as a student, "Living without family as a student is tough. I either save my money to order in *sehri* or make sure I cook beforehand. I order homemade food from a Bengali aunty in my building when I crave Bengali food. When cooking for myself, it is especially hard due to exams and studies. Overall, this hampers my frequency of fasting. But since

Malaysia is a Muslim country, professors let Muslim students out of class early and some restaurants are open during *sehri* so that was a plus."

It can be a significant change for those who had shifted abroad with their families too, as narrated by Biva Afrida, 23, student of the University of Maryland, USA. She commented, "Honestly, the only reason I even remember it is because I live with my parents. I was very lucky that my mom, even after coming back from work, tries her best to make iftar. However, I do miss the food prep we used to do in Bangladesh. We used to give (and receive) *iftar* from all the neighbours, something I really miss since I loved the *begunis* one of my neighbours made. Having said that, I think the biggest change is explaining to people outside why I am not eating for the entire day."

Before moving abroad for educational purposes, people warn you of the need to be completely self-reliant, of homesickness and the sudden strong urges to just wake up and catch the quickest flight home, and if it is Ramadan, of potential difficulties you will face. Whether it was worse, better, or exactly as you expected, here is hoping you persevere against homesickness and find comfort in what you have near you, while patting yourself on the back for adapting to unfamiliar situations.

Wherever you are this month, I wish you all a happy Ramadan.

*Names have been changed upon request.

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Fried items are the favourites at iftar.

PHOTOS: BIVA AFRIDA



ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

THE DIMENSIONS OF FASTING

I
"You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God" ~ Surah Al-Baqara (2:183).

It was 610 AD. The month of Ramadan ("scorching heat"). He approached his favourite sanctuary, cave Hira on Jabal Al Noor (the Mountain of Light). He was in deep meditation. An event happened that changed his life and history.

Angel Jabra-eel (Gabriel) descended from the heavens. Jabra-eel commanded, "Iqra" (read). He responded "I cannot read." Jabra-eel commanded one more time, "Iqra." Jabra-eel then narrated to him what would become the first verses of the Quran, "Iqra Bismi Rabbi-ka..." (Read in the Name of thy Lord).

Puzzled, he narrated the event to his wife, Khadijah. The two went to visit Khadijah's cousin, Waraqah Ibn Nawfal. On hearing, Waraqah testified to the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). He warned that those before him who came with such revelations received hostility. Waraqah's words proved true, and he couldn't live to see the ascent of Muhammad (PBUH).

II
 Fasting has been practiced from ancient times. The reasons have been spiritual, physiological, and even to avoid food shortage during lean seasons.

Physicians since Hippocrates of Greece believed fasting had healing properties. In India, Ayurveda has prescribed fasting for centuries. In ancient times, warriors would fast before a war. People would fast to avoid natural catastrophes; and also in prayers for the dead and those who aren't in good health.



Iftar hours at Masjid an-Nabawi in Madinah, Saudi Arabia.

PHOTO:
 KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

III
 Fasting is observed across religions. Most fasts follow a pattern of two meals. There may or may not be restriction of water, while each religion has their own diet prescriptions. There are differences when fasting takes place and how many days people will fast.

In the Vinaya tradition, Buddhists don't eat after lunch, till dawn the next day. Some Jewish groups fast six days a year. Different Churches fast for 40 days during Lent in commemoration of Christ's journey into the desert for 40 days. Hindus fast on certain days of a lunar month or during religious festivals.

IV
 In Islam, compulsory fasting came in three stages. In the first stage, Muslims fasted on Ashura (the 10th day of Al-Muharram). In the second stage, Muslims had the option to fast in Ramadan or feed a person on the days they could not, with preference on fasting. Finally, in the second year of Al-Hijrat, 624 AD, in the month of Shaban, fasting was made compulsory for every able Muslim during Ramadan – with exemptions in certain cases.

The Islamic calendar being lunar means that the first of Ramadan is approximately eleven days earlier each year. Two proper meals are advised. The first during Sehri, after which a fast begins and Iftar, just after sunset when a fast is broken.

Fasting in Ramadan is not just about staying away from food and drink in between Sehri and Iftar. It's an opportunity to look into one's own self to practice self-discipline, and empathy to understand and feel another person's hardships. This is why during this month able Muslims tend to give their Zakaat (2.5 percent of their wealth), one of the five pillars of Islam. At the end of Ramadan, there is celebration, Eid-ul-Fitr.

V
 Religions have provided time-tested moral codes of conduct. He who has wealth is obligated to help and take care of those who don't. He who has wealth, should be humble. In these testing times of the coronavirus, may the essence of fasting in Ramadan be to help all we can. May the essence be not to show-off our wealth in the real or the virtual world

Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Lesser-Known Wedding Rituals from Around the Country

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

Matches are made in heaven, but in Bangladesh, weddings are no less than a hefty affair in bringing people together. Today, we see these age-old traditions take new forms in modern celebrations. Although there are some regressive rituals, most of them paint a picture of innocent sentiments.

The *aiburobhaat* is a pre-wedding custom that is celebrated in regions like Khulna and other parts of the country. Before the day of the actual wedding, the bride or bridegroom's family (mostly the mother and the aunts) hosts a party exclusive to close relatives and friends as a see-off ritual. These days the families also celebrate the occasion a day or two before to properly send off their loving child. The term "*ai-buro*" refers to an unmarried young adult and *bhaat* (rice), juxtaposed with this means the last meal of the singles before marking their new lives. Though the sentiment behind this ritual is somewhat sweet, these days it often turns into an exhibition of the opulence of the family the girl or boy is getting married into.

In parts of Dinajpur and Sirajganj, there's a tradition of giving monetary gifts to the bride or groom during the *gaye holud* ceremony. The guests pay a pretty penny as a blessing to the soon-to-be newlyweds after applying turmeric to their bodies.



In Chakma weddings, the groom's younger sibling welcomes the new bride by washing her feet.

PHOTO:
 HILL VALLEY PRODUCTION

Despite it being heavy on the pockets of the guests, this sure is a great kick-starter to the couple's honeymoon funds.

This isn't the only ceremony that involves monetary transactions. The youngsters of the families, in cahoots with the bride and groom's friends, play different

pranks on the wedded pair in hopes of earning a little cash. We've heard of *juta churi* and *gate dhora* but in different regions, these wedding practices wear a different hat.

In Noakhali and some other parts of Bangladesh, a handwashing prank is played

on the bridegroom when he goes to the bride's house for the wedding ceremony. Before eating, the groom is given soap and water to wash his hands but the mischievous bunch holds him captive as he is left in a pickle with foam lathered hands while the water is snatched away from him. The only way out is paying a small ransom to his new in-laws. The bride isn't spared from such games either. The couple has to negotiate with "team groom" to enter their room on their nuptial night, evading chili powder-spiked drinks and eager eyes.

The festivities don't stop here. In the rural parts of Bengal, there's a post-wedding ritual called the "*jamai bazar*" or locally known as "*aaraihulla*" in Chandpur where the groom is fed leftovers from the wedding programs, until he buys fresh produce for his new family. The freshly-bought produce is then cooked into a feast for everyone. Albeit not prevalent in the urban areas anymore, in Sylhet and its surrounding areas, the bride has to cut a fish in an effort to prove her competency in household chores. There's usually a roll of cash tucked in the fish's throat for the bride to find as a blessing for embarking on her new journey.

Farnaz Fawad Hasan wants to play Jenga with chicken nuggets. Reach her at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com

The Monochrome Musing of a Silver Soul

FAIRUZ FAIZA

There she casts a mercurial veil
On a land perched ever so high.
Above the mountains,
Inviolable to the touch,
The sky was her fortress.

Her beauty was deemed ethereal,
Epistles written one after another,
Her sanctity gazed upon.
But why, she wondered,
Must her semblance be culled?

Her strength never reached an impasse
Though she was the collateral in other's wars
Against themselves.

The black heavens elevate her name.
Ever in variance her heart arrests the tune,
The tune of our affliction.
Followed by the clamour
Of our salvation.

When the apex of your forlorn body is upwards,
You can hear the cravings of her melody.
Etched on the endless, abysmal sky,
And in there you shall witness
The fragility of the earth.

She rests in the chasm
Blended by the dark
Amid the blizzards of the starlight
Without the ark.

A soulful marriage of the velvet dark
And the soft spoken truth.
A music for the eyes,
She is the moon.

*The writer has completed HSC from Bir Shreshtha
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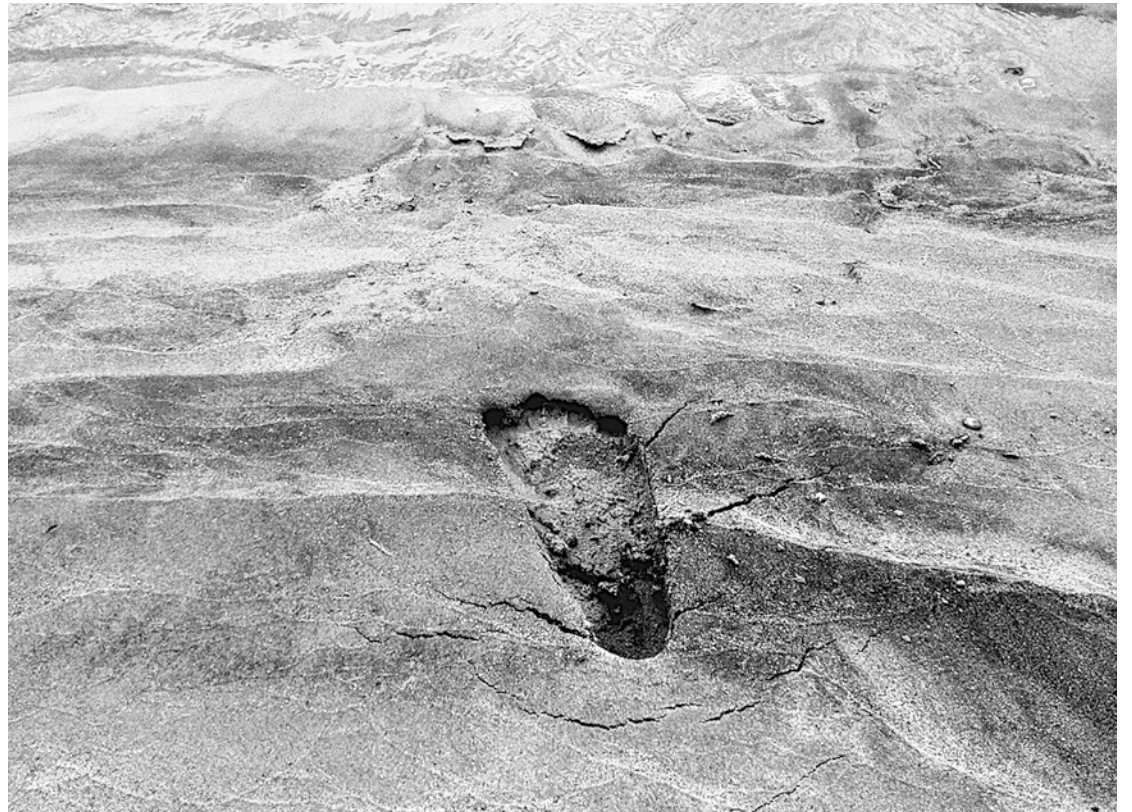


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

WASHED ASHORE

MAIF MUHAMMAD KRITI

Thrashing the door open, the old man strode towards the bay. A woman followed him, pleading with him. A blustery wind gusted past them as they approached the shore.

Babor ignored his wife's repeated admonitions. The sky was cloudy for sure, but he had survived in weather much worse. He snapped at her, "I will be fine. Now let me leave with no more of your blabbering. Shut your mouth and go to the kitchen. The fish won't taste any good without warm rice."

His wife wasn't sure. She had this presentiment deep down that something bad was going to happen. But she could not summon up the courage to stop her husband. Just before setting off, he said, "If Mirza comes, tell him I will return the money when I come back."

She nodded and saw her husband setting off into the sea, leaving a trail behind his wake.

Babor wasn't a fisher by choice, it was his fate. His father and his grandfather and all his forefathers were all up to fishing. The thoughts of whether he should be a fisher or something else didn't cross his mind for once. He was in this from his early childhood. His father sailed, and he would do the small chores.

Babor knew the sea well, very well. In fact, he claimed to be born of the sea. Others who listened to this thought of it as some kind of joke and laughed off. But Babor wasn't joking.

The sky was growing greyer as time went on. The sombre sky above the raging sea, tides crashing into each other, this scenario was quite familiar to Babor. He threw his net into the sea, waiting patiently. While at this, he opened his wooden vault and brought out a radio. Rotating the dial, he tried to tune it, but nothing happened. He wasn't sure if the batteries were dead, but he assumed hitting it would do the trick. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

After a couple of futile attempts, he threw the radio back in the vault; he could tell the weather just by sensing the air. He rummaged through the vault and came up with an amulet. This amulet was his father's. He passed it down to him as a bequest. Babor believed it to be a charm, he believed it had brought boons to his ancestors.

The boat kept heaving up and down, and it was quite painstaking to fish in this situation. However, Babor didn't want to compromise. He had come to fish, and fishing he would do. The wind was mounting stronger than ever; it tousled Babor's unkempt hair even more, splashed water droplets onto his face.

The tides were getting higher and higher. Water kept amassing on the deck; he had to drain it with his bucket. Babor remembered one night, he went to sea with his friends, a sea storm had also surged that night, but they returned with their lives. Many years had passed since then, some of his friends had already died. But Babor was still hanging in there. Age left its mark on his face, years of experience, years of penance, years of struggle glowed from the wrinkles of his seamed face.

But age didn't help him on the battered boat trying to survive the high waves. Water kept rushing and Babor was struggling to keep it in balance. He clutched the amulet firmly in his fist, instead of the paddles. It was his creed.

This time, fear finally shot through Babor. He looked in the shore's direction, where his wife was waiting for him, with warm rice. Then he looked upward, towards the thunder blazed sky, he ought to return.

At the time the storm seemed to ebb away, Zainab had just finished with the rice. Other than her husband, no one had gone into the sea in this weather. She only could pray at that moment.

When the storm cooled off, dusk was closing over the island. Patches of clouds were making their way towards the horizon; the sombre sky was already purpling into dusk. The smell of the brackish water wafted through places; the sea was calm again, tiny waves kept brushing past the coast. An idle wind tousled the pine trees, as gentle waves swayed the grasses.

The tides had carried the remnants of a boat. Amid the vestiges, an amulet gleamed in the light of the setting sun, offering a pale hint of loss. Aside from the flock of seagulls, no one was there to witness it. No one ever knew.

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INSIGNIFICANT

A city renders us into faceless silhouettes. Insignificant.
It moves at its own pace. Some of us lead the way.
Most of us fall behind.
A city exists, while we get on with our lives.

PHOTO: UMMID ASHRAF
WORDS: UMMID ASHRAF & AZMIN AZRAN

