

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.

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