



HOW MONSTROUS IS THE  
"MONSTER" IN MONSTER  
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CAN ARTIFICIAL  
INTELLIGENCE BE BIASED?

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# Before they were MOTHERS



# EDITORIAL

Mother's Day is around the corner and I'm sticking with my usual routine of ordering flowers and avoiding watching Mother's Day the movie for yet another year (it's because of the colourful reviews). Moms are called superheroes but in raising our moms to this status, we avoid treating them as humans with feelings, desires and lives of their own. After all, their routine usually revolves around those of everyone else's in the house.

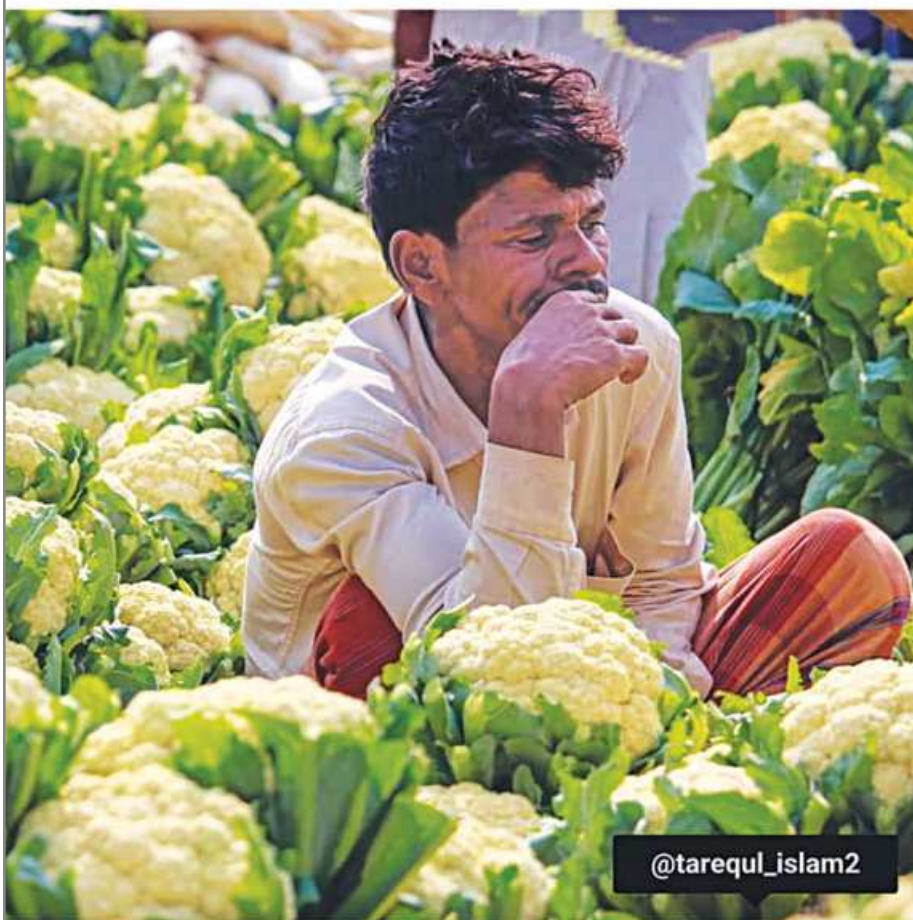
It hurt when mid conversation a friend's mom once candidly dropped "I never wanted to get married. This isn't a life I would've chosen for myself," throwing her arms up to refer to the chores that are waiting for her around her house. I am grateful for the sacrifices these moms made. But I also look forward to the day when moms' stories won't be filled with things that mattered to them they needed to give up just to be good moms.

-- Mrityika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



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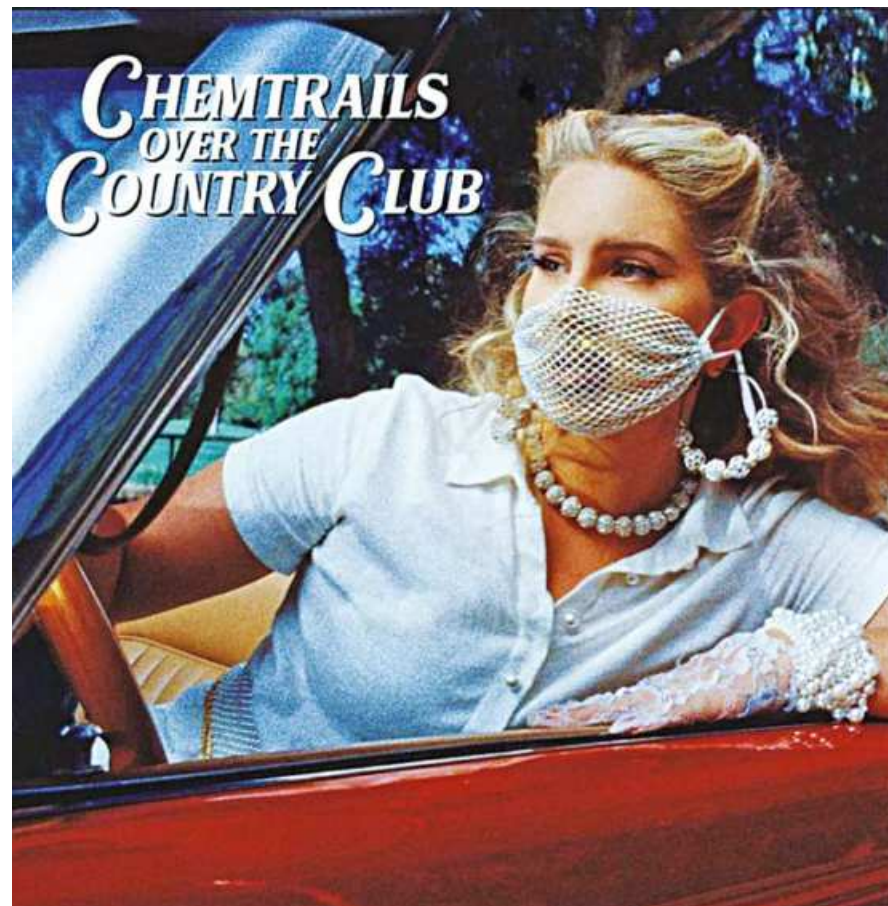
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## PLAYWATCH

### ALBUM REVIEW



## A Reflective Lamentation

### DURDANA KAMAL

Following the success and acclaim of her last album, expectations were soaring for Lana Del Rey's latest musical venture, and the woman did not disappoint.

*Chemtrails over the Country Club* is the seventh studio album by Lana Del Rey, and it was released on March 19, 2021. While listening to it, my first impression was the similarity to its predecessor. Lana never fails to make the listener feel a series of polarised emotions based on her intuitive lyrics, and this album continues to evoke a sense of nostalgia just like her previous album. The sleek transition between each of the tracks made me feel like I was listening to an elongated story rather than separate tracks.

The lyrical content of this album was classic Del Rey, as she sings about troubled love, past and fame. In "Opener White Dress", she sings about her life as a waitress, wondering if she was better off and reminiscing about a different time in her life. What I love about Lana is how candid her lyrics are, and how she lures you into her space until you feel like you understand her completely. She sings about the dark side of fame in one of my favourite songs on the album, "Dark But Just a Game", where she claims that "their stories all end tragically... the best ones lose their minds."

Lyricaly, the recurring theme of this album is sadness and melancholy, very much like her previous albums. However,

Lana's songwriting seemed a bit more assured and definitely more intimate on this album. It was like taking a leap into her world or sneaking a look into one of the pages of her personal diary.

At some points, I felt like the album was a little too familiar-sounding, but a second listen definitely helped me to distinguish the differences. Maybe Lana Del Rey's sound has become too distinct, too recognisable – but it didn't get exhaustive as it helped to build her own world within her album. When someone hears a Lana Del Rey song, they will instantly know it is her.

There were country and folk influences in this album, which is always an auditory treat. The background instrumentation was more subtle than her previous albums. Ditching the orchestration, this album had more acoustic guitars and muted sounds. For me, this was a welcome change, as it helped to differentiate this album from her earlier work.

Dialling back on the melodrama a little, this album is like an after party – quieter, more relaxed but just as sincere, if not a little more personal. *Chemtrails over the Country Club* is an amazing listen as it showcases vulnerability and nostalgia painted within a very American fantasy.

Durdana Kamal likes to engage in activities which mostly do not serve any purpose whatsoever. Contact me through [kamal.durdana@gmail.com](mailto:kamal.durdana@gmail.com)



# How Monstrous Is the “Monster” in Monster Movies?

**RASHA JAMEEL**

*In the Heart of the Sea* (2015) was a pretty terrifying film. No, I’m not talking about the aggressive sperm whale. I’m talking about the disturbing glee with which the sailors on screen hunted down and harpooned helpless whales. I’m talking about watching the carcasses of dead whales populate the seas while the sailor men celebrated the barbarism of such an act. The 2015 release inspired by Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is neither the first nor the last to glorify humankind’s unprovoked battles against other species, and other crimes against the environment.

The movie business appeared to be booming in the “monster movie” sub-genre throughout the 20th century. From Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack’s *King Kong* (1933) to Ishiro Honda’s *Godzilla* (1954) to Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), the audience thoroughly enjoyed humanity’s predictable victories over vicious, otherworldly creatures. As a member of the audience, I’ve always viewed the T-Rex from *Jurassic Park* and the great white shark from *Jaws* as predatory “monsters”, from the perspective of the filmmakers. I imagine you, the reader, have perceived these aforementioned creatures similarly, as ferocious beasts always poised to lay waste to life around them at will. But have you ever wondered what it is that drives them to act in such a destructive manner?

About two years ago, I’d come across a fictional children’s novelist in an HBO show discussing her new book where a hunter was on the trail of a bear in a desperate bid to protect his family from the creature, whilst being completely unaware of how the bear sought to do the same for its own family. The thought may have come from a fictional TV character but that doesn’t make it any less valid as a theory which applies to the behaviour of rampaging beasts in monster movies, or those in real life even. Going back to 2015’s *Moby Dick*-inspired adaptation, the sperm whale was made to seem like a vicious monster of sorts, hellbent on wreaking havoc, whereas the crew of the merciless whaling ship were portrayed as helpless victims of the whale’s wrath. That’s not *really* how it is, is it?

Those sailors willingly chose to go out and upend the peaceful lives of whales whose only crime was existing in a greedy world overcome with consumerism. The whale was never the aggressor; she was merely protecting her home.

The long withstanding notion in monster movies seems to be that humankind’s endeavour to constantly invade wild habitats can be justified by some kind of a twisted logic, which makes any retaliation from a defensive life-form appear unwarranted. Resurrected animal species are expected to fit right into a world they know nothing about and wild animals are expected to give up their habitat for the sake of humanity’s recreational activities.

One can argue that recently-released monster movies have made an attempt to be apathetic towards these fictional “monsters”. But even those efforts fall short as half measures. Humankind’s crimes against nature might have been acknowledged by the fictional Dr. Serizawa in an ominous one-liner in the *Godzilla* reboot (2014), but Legendary Entertainment left no stone unturned when it came to demonising the kaiju throughout the film.

I ask you, again, is the monster you see on the silver screen really the demon that film studios want you to see? Or can you finally see their survival plight in a world overwhelmed by our rising demands for excessive goods?

Rasha Jameel is your neighbourhood feminist-apu-who-writes-big-essays. Remind her to also finish writing her bioinformatics research paper at [rasha.jameel@outlook.com](mailto:rasha.jameel@outlook.com)

# On the Perpetual Persecution of Productivity Anxiety

**TAZREEN JAHAN BARI**

Being a university student with your entire life unplanned is sufficiently scary to push you into a cycle of feeling worthless for not doing anything “productive” then latching on to every and all opportunity vaguely related to your field of interest. That too for the sole purpose of validating your existence by adding one more line to your resume.

This cycle of shame for not being productive enough followed by productivity fetishism is what constitutes *productivity anxiety*, a state of mind where you feel anxious if you do not resemble an ultra-efficient machine utilising your time to maximise your productive output. Especially for undergrads occupying the liminal space between a student and responsible adult, anxiety runs on an all-time high if you do not feel you are doing enough to make yourself worthy of the job you will soon be seeking.

Caught in the relentless grind, we are systematically objectified into individual production houses where our self-worth is measured by achievements and efficiency. Add the “every parent wants their child to be an overachiever” in this dehumanising mix and you get the perfect social setup to create a group of young adults who are perpetually stressed and constantly overworked. Yet they cannot seem to outrun the anxiety and subsequent self-loathing because if you are not topping your classes, publishing research papers, starting your own business, profiting from your creativity and doing five internships simultaneously, are you sure you are doing enough?

As we are quick to accept a perpet-

ually anxious student but sceptical of a constantly happy one, it is easier to believe the former to be normal. In reality, it is just a sign of having internalised the capitalist narrative which should be questioned, not worshipped. The good news is, no matter how much your surrounding wants you to believe there is no room for negotiation between an all-rounder and an utter failure, like most things in life, there is always a grey area where you can choose to be human instead.

While I will not suggest you waste your money on the newest Rupri Kaur poetry collection, her poem “Productivity Anxiety” is worth giving a read. Sadly, reading a poem will not magically solve the bouts of anxiety chasing after you but it is a start and no small solace. From there it’s consciously choosing not to compete with your peers, being selective about your side hustles and understanding that taking rest is not a sin.

The distorted tale of productivity and self-worth is not only something we have internalised but also something perpetually emphasised by our social setup, making the process of breaking free twice as hard. So, remember to take your time. And for now, let me remind you that the thinking-feeling part of your existence cannot be measured by the number of vaguely relevant internships you managed to land.

Tazreen Jahan Bari is a final year undergraduate student who deals with her anxiety by binge-watching questionable k-dramas. Send her K-drama suggestions at [tazreezahan@gmail.com](mailto:tazreezahan@gmail.com)



# Can artificial intelligence be biased?

NASHRAH HAQUE

Algorithms are everywhere. It's guiding our internet search results, removing the guesswork from our online shopping experience, assisting us in selecting the next Netflix show and even in the ads we see on Facebook.

Algorithms are nothing more than math and code. However, they are created by humans and rely on our data. Since humans are susceptible to error and prejudice, the algorithms they create may have errors too. Depending on who designs them, how they are built, and how they are actually used, these systems may be biased. Actual biases are imitated or even overstated by AI systems. This is known as algorithmic bias.

Bias isn't always a bad thing. Our minds are attempting to locate trends in data in order to save time. This does not become a concern until we fail to recognise exceptions to patterns or begin to treat certain groups of people unfairly.

As a result, it is important to understand the distinction between bias, which we all have, and discrimination. Understanding algorithmic bias will benefit us in the future if it is used in negative or discriminatory ways.

## CURRENT BIASES ARE REFLECTED IN THE DATA

In 2019, Facebook began allowing advertisers to target advertisements based on gender, race, and religion. For example, women were prioritised in job advertisements for nursing and secretarial positions, while janitors and taxi drivers were mostly advertised to men, especially men from minority backgrounds.

Also, when we search the term "nurse" in Google Images, images of female nurses appear first, while the opposite happens for the word "programmer". This is because the AI was trained on news/books that correlated these occupations with a particular gender. We can see how implicit data stereotypes are ingrained in search engine AI.

What happens next is that an AI hiring system discriminates against people who do not fit the stereotype. A resume for a nursing role with the words "Male chess club captain" in it may be rejected by the AI system because it is not something associated with the average nurse. It may throw out qualified programmer resumes from people who attended women's colleges, because most programmers haven't.

A real-life example of how training data can produce sexism in an algorithm, is when Amazon trained their AI model using historical data from the previous ten years. Since there was a male domination in the tech sector and men made up 60 percent of Amazon's staff, historical data contained discrimination towards women. As a result, Amazon's hiring method wrongly learned that male applicants were preferable and downgraded female applicants.



So, the machine eventually learned to discriminate against women.

## PREDICTION ACCURACY

The training data may not have enough examples of each class, which can affect prediction accuracy. Many facial recognition algorithms are trained on data that contains far more faces of white people, than any other race.

A few years ago, a passport photo checker was created with an AI system which alerts the user if the person in the photo has blinked, so they can take the picture again. However, the machine continued to produce errors when presented with images of Asian people.

The algorithms will have blind spots if there is insufficient data. This is where the issue of algorithmic bias enters the picture. In certain cases, a group of people decides what data set the computer will learn from. So, if a camera company teaches its AI to identify open eyes by using Caucasians as primary learning examples, it is easy to

see how the blink detection would be triggered when an Asian person steps into the frame.

## DATA TAMPERING

This is when a group of people purposefully tamper with training data. For example, in early 2016, Microsoft released Tay, an AI chatbot that was expected to engage in intelligent conversations with Twitter users. Tay was trained on direct Twitter chat threads. The project would demonstrate the promise and potential of conversational interfaces powered by AI.

Tay began tweeting aggressive, sexist, and discriminatory tweets only 12

hours after it was released following a "coordinated assault by a subset of citizens." The fact that AI can be manipulated means we should treat algorithmic predictions with caution.

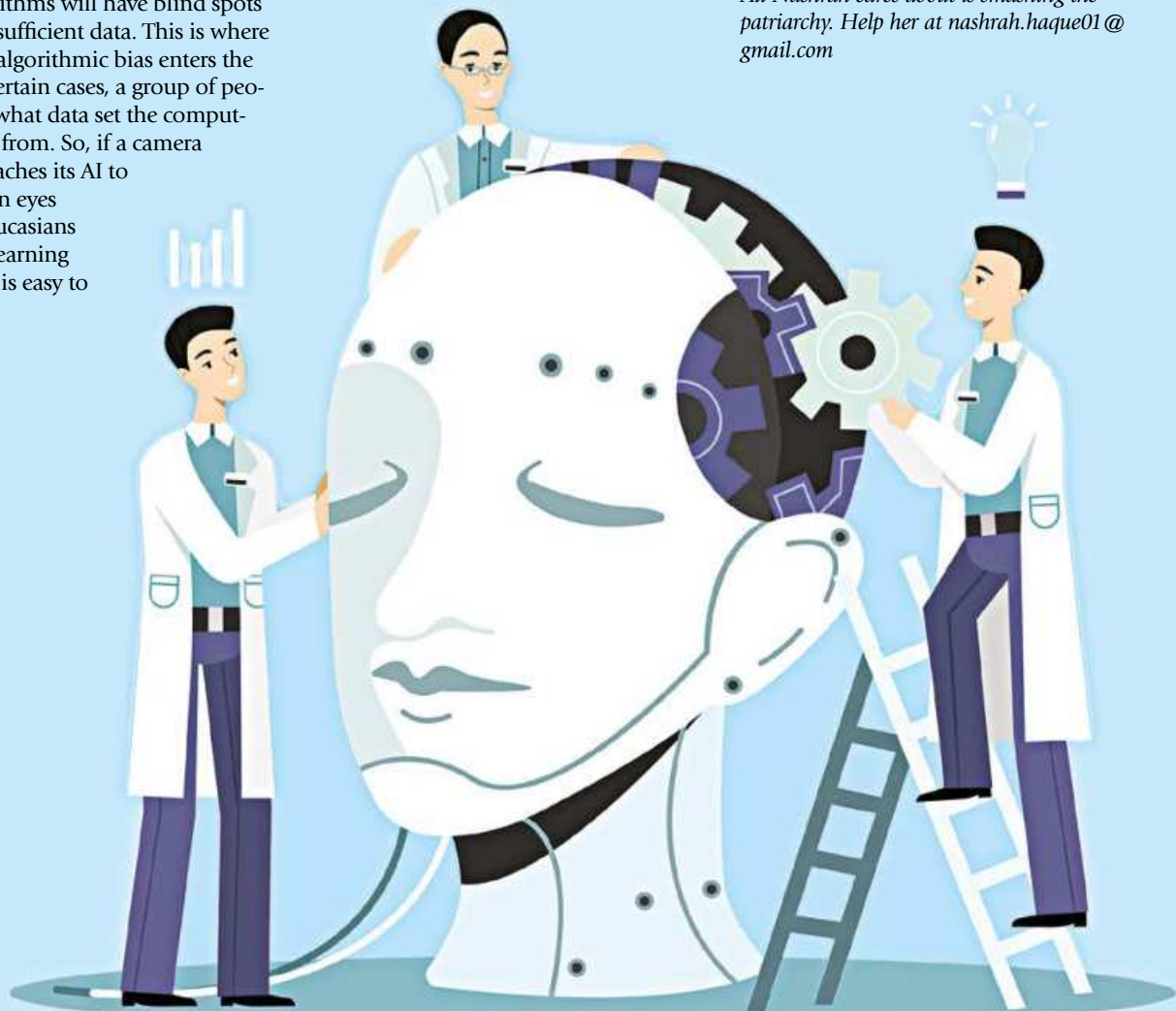
If algorithmic bias is not tackled, it may contribute to the amplification of human biases. Humans seem to trust the judgment of AI algorithms because they believe software isn't biased, oblivious to the fact that those decisions are already representing their own biases. As a consequence, we'll embrace AI-driven decisions and generate more flawed data for those algorithms to "improve" on.

More training data on protected groups, such as ethnicity, gender, or age, may be needed if we want less biased algorithms. Examining an algorithm's recommendation for protected groups might be a good way to search for discrimination. At the same time, these questions still arise. Can algorithms really produce total equality? And who is responsible for ensuring that the corporations and individuals who build these programs do so in the spirit of social equality?

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All Nashrah cares about is smashing the patriarchy. Help her at [nashrah.haque01@gmail.com](mailto:nashrah.haque01@gmail.com)



# BEFORE THEY WERE MOTHERS

FATIMA JAHAN ENA & SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

It feels strange to think that our moms were entire people of their own before we came to know and love them, and it feels even stranger to think we have almost no idea who they were back then. We decided to ask some of our moms about the people they used to be, the lives they led and the changes they've had to go through to be able to take on the role of the mothers. We spoke to Anupama Rahman, Iffat Eunus Alam, Samira Yunus, and Shoera Sarwar about the people they were before crying babies took over their lives.

Speaking of life when she was younger, Anupama Rahman is reminiscent, "My friends and I lived near each other and we all went to the same school. We used to meet regularly in the afternoon or evenings. All throughout school, college, and even university, we all had great intimacy because we spent so much time together. Those were some great times."

Shoera Sarwar, on the other hand, misses being a more hopeful person, "Life was more enjoyable and happier. I used to think that people would not be bad, and happiness seemed more attainable."

As young people, our mothers must have had hobbies as well, things they used to love doing but don't do anymore. "My hobby has always been reading. Everyone in my household used to read so we had a great collection of books. I was also involved in singing. I used to participate in TV shows for children. I did the letters for children's magazines. I was a newscaster for BTV from



Then and Now: Iffat Eunus Alam with her daughters.

1994 to 1995," says Anupama.

Shoera spent her days studying, cooking, and sewing clothes. "I was interested in fashion and writing poetry as well. My friends and I would meet at Baily Road. Overall, my life was cheerful," she adds.

Motherhood presented a change in circumstances, and for our mothers, we'll laid plans and career goals had to change as well. Iffat Eunus Alam was determined to become a flight attendant because she imagined her life travelling around the world. "However, as time went on and I got married, it didn't seem like a realistic option so I decided against it. I was also very interested in fashion and wanted to start my own boutique where I'd design dresses myself," she adds.

Samira Yunus retells the story of how her determination helped her pursue the career she wanted from the get-go, "I was always very career oriented. I chose a very unorthodox subject, Actuarial Science. I chose it because I absolutely loved math, and the future prospects of the subject seemed very promising to me. There were very few people in Bangladesh who had passed all fourteen subjects required, at the time. I was met with a lot of criticism and most people

around me had doubted my capabilities and told me it is a very demanding field so I should reconsider as I would one day be expected to look after my family. But I never paid heed to any of it and decided to go for it."

Things don't always work out, and oftentimes, the support required from family is absent. Such was the case for Shoera Sarwar, who dreamed of becoming an architect. "Unfortunately, my own family was not supportive of my goal. Still, I tried studying the subjects I was interested in, secretly. But I was caught. So, I was not allowed to study the science subjects anymore, even by hiding."

Motherhood, and the larger responsibilities of having a family tends to get in the way of life trajectories for many women. Priorities change, and without a supportive family who are open to shared responsibilities, career tracks are often pushed to the back of the queue.

Iffat Eunus Alam's story goes a bit like this as well. "I wanted to pursue a Master's in Political Science or Sociology, but I never got the opportunity. I did not find the support I needed at home at the time and my husband was busy at work. On the day for my final exam for my Bachelor's, I had asked my husband to pick my daughters up from school since their school was very far from home and I would not be able to make it. Due to some misunderstanding, he had not picked up my younger daughter and she was left alone at school for hours, till my sister called to check in. That's when I knew that I had to stay home and look after my children. I had also briefly started a boutique



Shoera Sarwar was into fashion and dreamed of becoming an architect.

married posed extra difficulties to her education, which she wasn't ready to give up. "I got married while I was completing my undergraduate degree. I was not prepared for how fast-paced married life would be. There were certain rules and obligations that my in-laws expected me to follow, like asking for permission if I wanted to meet my friends. There were a lot of duties around the house that they expected me to do as well. They criticised me if I rested. All of this was happening while I was pursuing my degree. Then I became pregnant with my first child, which affected my studies. I had to give my undergrad's third year finals while I was pregnant."

If the necessary support system does exist, however, things fall into place, and the sacrifices made don't end up costing everything. Now an executive vice president of an insurance company, Samira Yunus' story is testament to that, "Being a single mom, I had a lot of responsibilities which set me back by a few years. However, I have an immensely supportive family who looked after my daughter while I worked and pursued my education. My daughter is also very understanding and has always supported my endeavours."

Life goes on, and despite the hardships, with or without support from family, our mothers find ways to become their own selves. Shoera Sarwar ended up pursuing her passion for poetry. "I was always inspired by nature to write poetry, so around 2017 I decided that I wanted to publish a collection of poems. I faced a lot of obstacles; I did not receive support from my family. My mother and daughter were proud of me, though. My daughter even gifted me a diary for organising my poems. Other people's reactions to my work on Facebook was another source of support and encouragement. I faced questionable publishers, who wanted to leech off my work. I overcame the obstacles and finally published my book in 2017."

Iffat Eunus Alam has found a way to live out a certain portion of her dream by starting an online page for clothes. "I hope I can save enough and find a way to start designing again. My children try to support me to the best of their abilities, but they have their own lives to worry about. It is my job to support them."

Let us celebrate our mothers for the strong and resilient women they are and have always been. We must also remember to acknowledge all that they have given up to make us who we are. We need to keep in mind the wonders that a supportive family can achieve, we all must do better to support the individuals who became our mothers.



PHOTO: COURTESY

but I let go of it during my elder daughter's O Levels since she needed my full support and time."

Becoming a BCS cadre and working in the administration service was what Anupama Rahman had planned for herself. But marriage changed things. "I realised that my plan would be inconvenient as it involved being posted to different places. So, my plans changed and I considered working with my husband, or pursuing my MBA degree. As I thought about these things, my daughter was born."

"After her birth I could not consider working. Even though it was a good job, I did not want to work all day while leaving her at home. My mother, relatives, and friends, still tell me that they were shocked to know that I chose not to work. As people say, 'When a child is born, the mother is born, too.' So, she became my priority. Of course, I do not look down on any parent who chooses to work. But it is not possible for a person to do everything. So, in my opinion, my decision was right because I could tend to my kids and have input in their studies, extracurricular activities, or personal development."

Shoera Sarwar was faced with the reality that being



**ECHOES BY**  
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

# THE ORIGIN OF EID-UL-FITR SONGS

I Abbasuddin requested his favourite Kazi Da to write a song for Eid. Nazrul calmly said, “Get me *paan* and tea.” Within minutes, Nazrul wrote the lyrics. He wanted to compose later, but Abbasuddin was a *nachhorbanda*. It had to be composed there and then.

It’s not that Nazrul never composed a tune on spot, or on request. Sachin Dev Burman once made such a request to his Kazi Da. Within minutes Nazrul had written and composed *Padmar Dheu Re* which Sachin recorded himself.

It was different this time. A new tune wasn’t spinning. Nazrul decided to rely on a previous tune. This isn’t uncommon among songwriters. Sachin Dev Burman once took the tune of *Mono Dilo Na Bondhu* and gifted *Jane Kya Tune Kahi* in the timeless movie *Pyasa*. Nazrul did the same that day. Within minutes Nazrul wrote and composed the Eid-ul-Fitr song, *O Mon Romjaner Oi Rojar Sheshe*.

II If you listen carefully to another song *Shukno Patar Nupur Paye*, or *Tribhuban er Priyo Muhammad* you may notice a foreign influence. It doesn’t feel Bengali or from Northern India. If your ears feel the same, then you’re on the road to finding out that both the songs were heavily influenced by a tune from the late Otto-

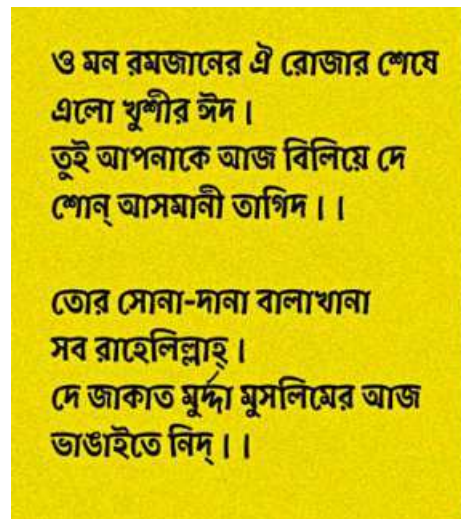
man era, in today’s Turkey.

The tune is based on *Üsküdar’a Gider Iken* (When going to Uskudar), or *Kâtibim* (The Clerk). It’s a song composed in the mid-18th century (or earlier). In those days, once a tune became popular, it would start travelling. The Ottoman empire was the most powerful empire after ancient Rome. Its boundaries spread westwards to modern-day Hungary and Poland. Greece was a part of the Ottoman empire for almost four centuries; as were parts of North Africa and the Middle East.

As a song travelled in the empire, some changes would be observed. The lyrics could change totally. The tempo could become faster or slower. Some notes could get displaced. Whatever happened, the original song/tune would be localised. Over time, it would be difficult to decipher that the two tunes are similar.

The influence of the Ottoman empire went far beyond its boundaries. Its tunes and architecture influenced Europe. The influence of their language, their cuisine, their tunes, their architecture, and even their administration soon got deeply embedded in the Indian sub-continent.

It was in this context, Nazrul heard *Üsküdar’a Gider Iken*. But Nazrul being Nazrul, realised the tune needed adaptation for the Bengali ear and its audience. The tempo of the original tune was composed for the *oud*



- the “guitar” that was developed by Ziryab from Al-Andalus. The original tempo was slow because the tune was not composed for mass people to sing along. Nazrul made the tempo a little bit faster. The original composition lost some of its flat/sharp notes. They were replaced by natural notes. Why? It takes some mastery to sing or play flat/sharp notes. This song was meant for people to sing, not for connoisseurs.

III This was the mastery of Nazrul. He could

write and compose a song for any occasion. During Eid-ul-Fitr this year, when you listen to *O Mon Romjaner Oi Rojar Sheshe* and *Tribhuban er Priyo Muhammad* chances are you will be transported to a new realm.

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## Subliminals on YouTube: What is it?

**ZIBA MAHDI**

The internet may be weird, but YouTube communities are even weirder. One such community is the subliminal community.

A little introduction to subliminals: there is usually two types of these videos. Audio subliminals are usually made up of indiscernible jabbering overshadowed by random music. The second type is visual subliminals. Like the name suggests, they flash positive affirmations in a rapid fashion repeatedly. The aforementioned jabbering and affirmations are apparently subconscious messages that are meant to reprogram our brain.

Subliminal users believe that these masked messages enter our subconscious mind and biohack it to get a person’s desired result. There’s a subliminal for just about everything under the sun, from gaining self-confidence to turning yourself into a mermaid (you read that correctly). As far-fetched as they may seem, there are subliminal videos on YouTube with hundreds of positive reviews, praising their efficacy. There’s even a Reddit community with people posting before and after photos of their subliminal journey. However, everything has a dark side. Some channels have been accused of hiding apocryphal messages and causing nightmares, to the point that they had to be removed from YouTube altogether.



There was an online petition to take down the channel Mind Power, as users accused it of brainwashing. Another YouTuber, Rose Subliminals, admitted to putting negative affirmations in her work. However, the majority of mainstream subliminal channels such as Akuo Subliminals, Quadible Integrity, Luminalplay, are safe to watch.

At their core, subliminals are based on the Law of Attraction, a pseudoscience which philosophises that people’s thoughts attract their results. While there is no scien-

tific basis for the Law of Attraction, proponents of this philosophy use theories from psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology to argue in favour of it. While subliminals’ popularity peaked in 2019, the concept itself dates back to the late 1800s. It was even used to teach soldiers in World War II to identify enemy planes. Widespread concern about this method first arose in 1957, when James Vicary claimed that he had increased sales in Coca Cola and popcorn in a movie theatre through subliminal manipulation. He retracted

his claim later on after failing to replicate similar results in another study. Popular movies like *The Exorcist* have been known to use subliminal messages to terrify their audience.

There is a fair number of conflicting opinions on whether subliminals work or not. A study from the University of Texas at Austin found that the effects of these subconscious messages only lasted less than five minutes. Another study showed that the subliminals only worked when negative messages were being delivered. Some believe that it can only change a person’s mindset and motivate them while others are convinced it can alter human DNA and break the laws of physics. In a nutshell, there’s no definite consensus on this issue. Meanwhile, it can’t hurt to try transforming into the mermaid you were always destined to be.

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Ziba Mahdi is your resident pessimist. Cheer her up at [www.facebook.com/ziba.mahdi.735](https://www.facebook.com/ziba.mahdi.735)

# THE NEXT ENCOUNTER

**MALIHA AKHTER**

My shaking reflection on the glass,  
Is neither dark nor vivid, rather something in between.  
The rustling sound of the half-dried leaves passes the  
double-decker bus.

The sun has long drowned in the sunflower field.  
I'm on my way to meet myself.

As I plug in my headphones, a slow melody chimes.  
But all I hear is that one heavy whisper.  
All of a sudden, a warm drop of tear followed by  
another fear,  
Falls down on my cheek.  
How am I going to meet myself?

I try to gently close my eyes, harshly shut my mind.  
The whisper is descending, for now, I believe.  
As I'm melting in my half-sleep,  
The gloomy clouds gather, wipe away my reflection,  
Leaving behind a long-lost fragrance.

I cannot meet myself just yet.

*The writer is a student of English at Metropolitan University, Sylhet.*

# My Powerhouse, My Guiding Light

**SAFWAT KHAIR RAYEEM**

"Remember, everything in this world happens for a reason. You may be unclear about its purpose now, but you will eventually find out. Never lose faith in yourself."

I grew up listening to this saying by my *Dadu*, as I would lovingly call my grandmother, my biggest inspiration, my number one supporter, my first teacher and my greatest gift from God.

From her early years, life put her through the gravest of miseries, yet she refused to give in. After watching her husband sacrifice his life during the Liberation War, my grandmother was left all alone to raise four young children. She sold their family car and started a small job. She worked tirelessly, day and night, to ensure that all her children received proper education, healthy food and had shelter. For many years, she sacrificed many of her wishes, only to fulfil theirs. Even in times of great distress, she pushed through. She never let her children be aware of the financial crisis she had to bear. She was more concerned with the well-being of her loved ones than her own. A person who found happiness in the successes of her grandchildren and somehow never forgot our birthdays even when she was extremely ill. Selflessness, endurance, and diligence were not the only qualities she possessed. She was someone who made a difference in a time when life refused to be anything but full of hardships, and she still does so because of what she instilled in me.

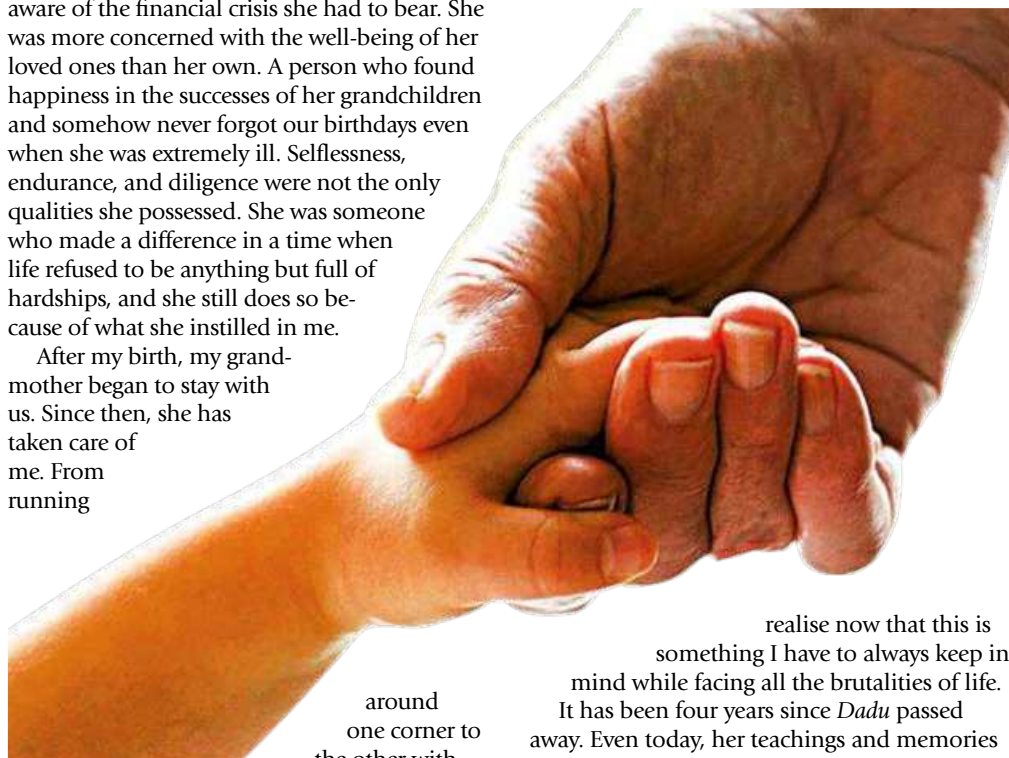
After my birth, my grandmother began to stay with us. Since then, she has taken care of me. From running

instil all her values and noble qualities in me.

*Dadu* was the reason I was able to overcome fear for the first time. I used to firmly believe that a robber or thief would come and murder me during my sleep. Yet, she easily convinced me into thinking thieves never target apartments. She could shed light into any perspective and I would take her word for it. If it were not for her, I would still be afraid of sleeping alone. She showed me that the real way of tackling fear is changing your approach towards it.

She taught me more about life and its repercussions than any counsellor ever could. She used to give me examples of her life where she learned the most valuable lessons. She taught me that it is imperative to always aim high in life, to never feel something is unachievable, to never think that the obstacles or setbacks are more significant than your goals.

"Never be afraid of failing in life. One cannot succeed in life without failing and then learning from it," said my grandmother. I



around one corner to the other with food to tending to every small wound, she effortlessly took up all the responsibilities simply because she loved to do so. She made sure I was never short of anything, whether it was food or toys or anything at all. She filled every void with her undying love and compassion. Throughout my childhood, I slept next to her in her room. At times, she would forget her sleep when I could not get mine. She would tell me fables and stories about her life and ruffle my hair till I fell asleep. She showered me with all the love in the world and always shielded me from getting scolded by my parents.

Growing up, my grandmother always ascertained to make me realise the power of education. Not only that, but she also made sure that I knew the importance of being a good human being; I was taught a lot about religion, studies, and demeanour. She endlessly endeavoured to

realise now that this is something I have to always keep in mind while facing all the brutalities of life. It has been four years since *Dadu* passed away. Even today, her teachings and memories are deeply engraved in my heart. She was a beacon of strength and joy to everyone who knew her. Needless to say, the gravity of her presence in my life is unfathomable. The biggest regret I will have in life is that I could never do something that even comes close to all that she has done for me. Oh, how much I wish she were here to see how far I have come in life. Months, years and even decades may pass by, but the way her soul emboldens me with the spirit of holding my head high as I tackle every single barrier put in front of me shall remain constant.

My *Dadu* inspires me to be better every day -- to be able to do justice to the part of her that lives within me. So that she always feels that no matter the day, her grandson will always make her proud.

*This piece is a tribute to the writer's grandmother, who passed away on May 7, 2017.*

# Low Maintenance Iftar Recipes

## AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

As I felt the responsibility to help my mom out with iftar this Ramadan, I realised while most aspects of life are complicated, cooking doesn't always have to be. Here are some recipes I gathered from my experimentation, they are easy and (spoiler alert) low maintenance

### POTATO FRITTER PANCAKE

If all the ingredients you use are yummy, there is no way you can mess up. Whatever you end up with after the cooking process will contain the same ingredients, and therefore, taste good.

*Ingredients:* 2 medium potatoes, 1 egg, as much cheese as your heart desires (this is optional but is it really?), 1 tsp each of salt, pepper and dried oregano, 1 tbsp cooking oil.

Peel your potatoes and then grate them. Add salt and pepper. On a medium frying pan, add oil and then the potatoes. Stir and cook the potatoes on medium heat for about 5 minutes. Spread the potato out covering the base of the pan and let it cook till the shape has settled. Whisk the egg and pour it on your pancake. Add shredded cheese. Carefully fold the pancake into half covering the filling. Cook till the bottom is golden brown and serve. Garnish with oregano.

### SEEKH KEBABS

The ingredient quantities are given for rough measure. I always eyeball them and don't bother if I don't have one or two at hand (except the meat and kebab spice of course). Always turns out pretty good.

*Ingredients:* 1 kg whichever meat you prefer, 50g kebab spice mix, 2 tbsp garlic paste, 2 tbsp green papaya paste, 2-3

tbsp ground green chillies, 2 tbsp cooking oil.

Grind up the protein in a food processor briefly so that the result is more chunky than mushy. Mix in the rest of the ingredients and leave it to marinate for 30 minutes to an hour. Coat your palms with oil and scoop out a big ball of the meat mixture and pierce it through the skewer. Spread the meat on the skewer into a cylindrical shape. You can either bake your kebabs in an oven, pan fry them or use a grill if you have one. Periodically turn the skewer while cooking. Serve once the kebabs are slightly charred.

### CHOCOLATE MILK UPGRADE

This is a beverage. No need to measure anything. Just taste your drink after adding each ingredient and figure out what to tweak.

*Ingredients:* 2 cups of milk, 1 (big) spoon of Nutella, sugar, cocoa powder, salt, vanilla essence, cream.

Whisk this in a pan over on your stove until it's well mixed and you're done. Let it cool and add ice if you want it cold.

*Pro-tip:* If you want it to be even lighter and fluffier then let it cool, put it in your blender and blend for about 30 seconds (trust me it's worth it).

The final instruction I'd like to give you is be humble and smile when the sophisticated taste of your food is praised. Do not reveal that they took minimal effort. I've been a good child, and now that you're armed with my knowledge and wisdom, it's your turn.

*Amrin Tasnim Rafa is always confused, it's literally her dominant personality trait. She challenges you to find something she won't think is confusing. Try your luck at amrinrafa@gmail.com*



# The (Dis)honour of Salami

## ABIR HOSSAIN

War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death – these are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. But alas! There is one more. It creeps along with the dark, dreary shadows while you naively feast on *payesh*, ready to jump at you at a moment's notice.

It never crosses your mind but once unravelled will keep you awake at night. It is the betrayal from your very own mother, who you trusted so dearly with your *salami*. There is no debate about how difficult it is to accumulate the right amount of earnings on Eid. Five hundred from the

miserly uncle? That's a win. One thousand takas from the aunt who lives in Canada? Travesty. However, the process is tiring, to say the least. It is taxing because the actual reward (if you can call it that) comes after a 10-minute-long lecture about how you should lose or gain more weight.

Nonetheless, all that battle boils down to futility for some and has moulded them as people for all the wrong reasons. It is the first glimpse we get at a taste of deceit. This fleeting and unnerving feeling often instils trust issues and delusional world views.

Nasha Zaman\*, 23, reflects on her first traumatic visit to the bank. "It was the first salary I received from tutoring

and there I stood behind the counter, supposedly ready to hand over the money for a deposit. That is until I shouted 'No! Ammu, I know this trick all too well.' The banker was kind enough to clarify he wasn't my mother but not kind enough, for me, to trust him with my money," she said. "Either way, I think all moms just banded together to create the first bank to snatch their children's *salami* and hence, it is the epitome of capitalistic greed."

While on the topic of capitalism, Shammo Rahman\*, 19, expresses his appreciation to his parents for showing the true colours of humanity. "Their act of beration has not made me angry with them. Instead, it has truly opened my eyes. The exploitation of the working class starts from day one and my parents demonstrated it. The poor, helpless child is left with nothing while the ruthless, insatiable parents have more. In fact, I am fairly certain my parents are advisors to Elon Musk," he stated.

Abrar Faisal\*, 21, talks about his difficult loss. "I was just 11 years old. Could you believe it? They just spent 2500 taka on the very school books my teachers would use to impart education that would separate my mind from my soul. Our parents explicitly instructed teachers that as long as they leave me healthy enough to take care of parents in their old age, our soul was theirs for the keeping. So, in a sense not only did I kiss my own dementor, but also told everyone about it."

The epidemic still looms large to this day. Parents might pass it off as tough love but the repercussions of their demeanour leave scars that carry on to impact children well into their adult lives. For now, let us hope that we do not scream at underpaid bankers or believe our parents have overseen an overwhelming hoarding of wealth by inter-planetary colonisers.

*\*Names have been changed because these are made up anyway.*

*Abir Hossain is a failed SoundCloud Rapper. Tell him you too can't find anything to rhyme oranges with at: fb/abir.hossain.19*

