

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 28, 2021, KARTIK 12, 1428 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



WHERE DO I START WITH YOU, MILU?

PG 3

WHAT MAKES A GREAT SHOW? SURVIVAL.

PG 4



SHOULD THEY BE NEUTERED?

PHOTO: BAGH & CO.

EDITORIAL

I enjoy going through the comment sections under YouTube videos. They are at times funny, and at times nostalgic.

There is this one comment under the video of Queen's performance of "Bohemian Rhapsody" at the Live Aid Concert that reads, "England was ruled by a different queen for one day". I really enjoyed that.

In a way, I feel that these comments transcend boundaries, and connect people on the basis of their similarities, tastes, likes and dislikes. Think about it – you are enjoying a Tame Impala song and that one part you love the most is also liked by AnimeKid29, who expresses it in the comments. And it is not just them, but thousands of others who like that exact same part, which they make evident by liking AnimeKid29's comment. You can feel a connection with them, even though you do not know who they are or where they are from.

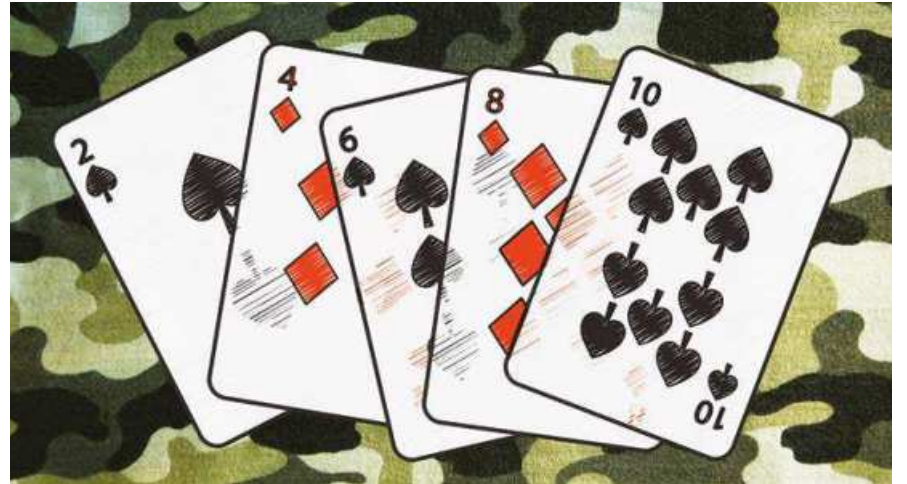
To me, that is somewhat special.

-- Faisal Bin Iqbal, Sub-editor & Digital Coordinator, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

GAMES



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

3 Card Games for Your Next Reunion

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

What is a get-together with your cousins or friends without a good game of UNO or Go Fish? However, playing the same two games repeatedly can be like watching paint dry.

Here are three easy-to-learn games that you can play anytime with a standard deck of cards.

WAR

War is a two to four-player game for people of all ages. The aim is to bag all 52 cards of the deck to be the winner.

The game starts by dealing the shuffled cards into two to four equal stacks, depending on the number of players. All the players flip the top card of their pile and compare. The one with the highest-ranking card takes all the cards on the table and adds them to the bottom of their pile.

The fun comes when two players flip the same card. If this happens, the players must yell "I declare war!" and put forth three cards from their decks facing down and flip over a fourth card. If the fourth card is also the same, then a "Double War" is declared, or else the person with the highest-powered card takes the cake.

SPOONS

If you loved playing musical chairs as a kid, you'll definitely enjoy playing spoons.

It's a 3 to 13-player game. More people, more fun. The dealer starts by dealing each player with four cards and keeping the rest on their right-hand side. A set of spoons (n-1) is arranged in the middle of the playing area. Soon after the

dealer picks a card from the deck on his right and discards one from his hand to the left, the others follow. This goes on until someone matches a suit and grabs a spoon. All must grab a spoon when he does. The player without the spoon is eliminated.

The game starts again with the number of players and spoons decreasing until there is only one winner.

EGYPTIAN RATSCREW

This is one of the most animated card games out there. Watch out because it gets physical.

The deck is divided equally, and a player starts the game by flipping a card face down in the middle so that everyone can see. Clockwise, the other players do the same until a face card or an ace appears. Things get heated up as the next player gets a certain number of chances based on the last card that was placed. Jack, King, Queen and Ace equal one, two, three and four chances respectively.

If the player cannot flip a power card within their allowed chances, the one who played the previous power card slaps the deck and takes everything in the pile. Anyone in the game can win by grabbing the pile when some special rules like a sandwich, double, top-bottom, tens, marriage, etc. appear. The one who gets to snatch all the cards in the deck, wins.

From magic to madness, the possibilities with playing cards are endless.

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Where do I start with you, Milu?

Remembering the lonely life of Jibanananda Das

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

After Milu died in 1954, his life's work was recovered from some black trunks in a corner of a grimy room at 183 Lansdowne Road. His sister Sucharita Das and poet Bhumendra Guha took responsibility for the preservation of these trunks. And to think that they almost lost these trunks, containing some 2500 poems, numerous unpublished short stories, essays, novels and his 4000-page diary, in the trams of Kolkata!

Born to a culturally inclined family, Jibanananda Das always had a questioning spirit in him. Unlike his mother poet Kusumkumari Das, he embodied an innate tendency of criticising cherished beliefs and institutions. Jibanananda despised the culture of Bengalis being satisfied with what he saw as mediocre, be it literature, music or their very way of life. This resentment at being mediocre is ironic for a poet who had a rather prosaic life.

Despite living in Kolkata, in the heart of the Bengali renaissance, introversion stood in the way of his deserved recognition. Tagore criticised him for heavy choice of words and metaphors whereas Nazrul's opinion of Jibanananda implied a hint of neglect. Despite being apprehensive and doubtful, Jibanananda stood by his poetry with conviction.

His poems had been described as surrealist, metaphorical, difficult, solitary and even obscene. Critics like Sajanikanta Das and Nirendranath Chakravarty were extremely vocal in criticising him for poems like "Bodh", "Campe", "Aat Bochor Ager Ekdin" and even "Banalata Sen", all of which laid the foundation for the phenomenon he later became. But Jibanananda believed his true readers weren't born yet, quoting the French author Andre Gide in his diary, "I do not write for the coming generation, but the following one."

But what made Kusumkumari's Milu the introverted loner that he was? Was it the heartbreak from his first love? Or perhaps his failed marriage? Dreadful years of unemployment, not getting deserved recognition, being tormented by critics and even his colleagues – all of this shaped the broken man that was Jibanananda.

Jibanananda's first and only love was his paternal cousin Shovona Das, to whom he dedicated his first anthology of poems "Jhora Palok", referring to her with the pseudonym "Kalyaniashu". Love, heartbreak and the grueling pain that follows – he saw it all in his years at Assam with Shovona, which inspired hundreds of poems later on. After he got a job at City College and moved to Kolkata, their romance suffered a premature death. Jibanananda ended up marrying Labanyaprabha Das in 1930.

Immediately after the marriage, Jibanananda lost his job at City College. This was the beginning of five consecutive years of unemployment, a collapsing marriage and consequent clinical depression. The frustration of his failed marriage was gravely reflected in his novels during this period. In the novel *Purnima*, the vile male character wishes for the death of his wife and child, depicting Jibanananda's own frustration with his marriage.

Poetry, Jibanananda's only artistic language, tormented him throughout his life. "I- concerned from every point of view and suffering greatly materially, spiritually and what pains me infinitely- artistically..." he wrote in his diary. He was never a fluent speaker, which is why he struggled as a teacher. Although he finally got a job at BM College in Barisal, he realised he was never going to be happy with his career.

After 1947, he had to leave for Kolkata with his family where he got a job at the newspaper *Swaraj*. However, the chaotic workplace repulsed Jibanananda. Even after settling into a stable life which he craved dearly in his earlier years, his inherent restlessness and fatigue for life proved never ending. His diary, during this period, paints a morbid picture full of distressing thoughts. Even after 20 years of marriage, marital contempt was apparent in his novel *Malyabaan*, whereas his love for Shovona persisted in other works.

Jibanananda was never an ideal husband or the provider he was expected to be. In his funeral, where literary figures from all around Kolkata gathered, Labanyaprabha told Bhumendra Guha with a heavy heart, "Your *dada* left so much for Bengali literature. What did he leave me with?"

He didn't. Jibanananda Das was never meant to be here, in this vile cycle we call life. In his own last words, he could see "colours of grey manuscripts all over the sky" on his deathbed.

As a reader of your work who lives decades after your death, I can only wish I could hold your hands then, Milu, and tell you that this world was never meant for someone as beautiful as you.

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What makes a great show? *Survival.*

DURDANA KAMAL

If you frequent any form of social media, you know of the existence of *Squid Game*.

The premise of this show is based on a capitalist society which lures debt-ridden citizens to participate in a series of games, where they have to make it to the end or die trying. A prize money of 45.6 billion won awaits the winner. It is grotesque and disturbing to witness the lengths people go to in order to survive.

And so we ask, how does such a concept attract over 130 million viewers?

Fascination with survival games in media is not recent; notable examples include Japanese movie *Battle Royale* (2000) and *The Hunger Games* (2012) franchise. While they are all unique in their purposes, all these films have one thing in common -- the gamification of survival. Just like the citizens of Panem in *The Hunger Games* who relish in watching the reality show where the characters butcher each other to make it to the top, we can't seem to look away from the TV screen either.

First, human beings have a tendency to be strangely intrigued by bloody and violent imagery, often relating to death. This

phenomenon is called "morbid curiosity", and this emotion allows the viewers to be transfixed on the disgusting scenes involving torture, death and gore. Morbid curiosity is the reason why millions of people tuned in to watch *Squid Game*, where economically disadvantaged people allow themselves to be put in a life-or-death situation to win the prize money.

There is also an element of rooting for a favourite character, and the suspense that draws you in and keeps you focused. The high viewership of these shows can be alluded to the innate competitiveness of human nature in a modern world. Therefore, we are left feeling a certain sense of satisfaction when our favourite character survives, even if they have done unspeakable things to get to the winning spot.

All of these movies or shows act as some form of social critique. For example, *The Hunger Games* was a critique of the consumerism and violence inherent in a capitalist society, as well as celebrity culture. *Squid Game* is a clear reflection of a system which is driven by monetary aspirations and surface-level fairness.

There is a rising popularity of movies



and shows that address real-life issues and raise awareness. While this popularity has much to do with the marketing, cast, soundtrack and editing, the conversations they raise among a young audience is actually beneficial. With the help of pop-

ular media, the current generation can be more aware about socio-political issues.

Durdana Kamal likes to do things which mostly have no purpose whatsoever. Contact: kamal.durdana@gmail.com

Have you heard of recommender systems?

NASHRAH HAQUE

Have you ever had the strange experience where you're talking to a friend about seafood pizza and then every ad you see on the internet after that conversation is for seafood pizza, or in some way related to pizzas? This happens because of recom-

ender systems.

Recommender systems use supervised and unsupervised learning approaches to learn about us. Since we're so multifaceted, recommending things to us is a difficult task that may yield a lot of unexpected outcomes.

Therefore, recommender engines use

artificial intelligence (AI) to understand our minds and provide us with valuable recommendations. The same technology is used to suggest YouTube videos or shows on Netflix.

AI that can make suggestions has the potential to alter the internet drastically. However, to comprehend the benefits and downsides of these algorithms fully, we must first learn where they acquire their data and how they operate.

The three main techniques for recommender systems are content-based recommendations, social recommendations, and customised recommendations.

Content-Based Recommendation

The substance of the content is the focus of content-based recommendations, not the audience. For example, the algorithm may choose to promote more recent videos or films created by someone on a list of excellent creators. Information such as items or services will be returned based on your preferences or viewpoints. The more information the user provides, the better the accuracy of this recommendation.

Personal metadata and individual transactional data may be absent at the start of some services due to privacy and legal concerns. For recommender systems that use this method, these concerns are frequently referred to as "cold start" issues. A cold start happens when a recommender system is unable to make conclusions for a query owing to a lack of data.

Social Recommendation

Social recommendations pay attention to the audience. It utilises social metrics such

as likes, views, and view time to determine what people are watching and engaging with, and should be recommended. This type of recommender uses collaborative filtering, by utilising their judgement and behaviours to make product recommendations to you or determine how one product could complement another. A common example is "next buy" recommendations while online shopping.

The problem here is that in the absence of previously acquired data, they are particularly vulnerable. It gets more difficult to participate in any single-person action when there is no relevant knowledge on others.

Personal Recommendation

People have various tastes, which AI systems can take into account when making tailored suggestions. The difficulty with customised suggestions is that it may be difficult to come across new, fascinating content, therefore recommender systems often use collaborative filtering, which combines all three of these recommendations to obtain the best of both worlds.

This notion that we all view slightly different versions of the internet and that data is continuously collected about us might be alarming but knowing how recommender systems function can help us live more informed lives while coexisting with AI.

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

Pets, should they be neutered?

TASNIM ODRIKA

Whether you have adopted a new pet recently, have had one since forever, or you're just an animal lover in general, you must have come across the argument whether or not to neuter or spay your animal friend (for the purposes of this article, moving forward, the word "neuter" would be an umbrella term to also include "spay").

Neutering an animal refers to the removal of either the whole or part of their reproductive organ. This can be a huge step to take and hence the first question that comes to one's mind is, "Why should I neuter my pet?"

There seem to be two streams of the argument, ranging from definite distaste towards the group unwilling to neuter their pets or strays, and the other group completely against the idea of putting an animal under the knife; the others being stuck somewhere in the middle. The reasons for their decision range from ethics to religion and a lot of the time are clouded by various myths and lack of awareness. The argument in favour of neutering a pet or a stray often makes the case for population control.

When it comes to caring for pets, Tashfeen Sara Ahmed, a caregiver for two pet cats, shares, "I think neutering is the best course of action because more often than not, neither you nor your pet will be able to sustain or care for the babies the way they need to be looked after. They'll either have to be given away to people who might not be trustworthy or responsible enough, who might breed them for their financial gain if your pet is an exotic breed, or they'll end up homeless and on the streets. There's already a surplus of street animals looking for homes and ways to survive, we can't afford to add to that."

She further shares how she came to this decision, "I've had pets since I was 12. But I only started neutering my pets because the adult cats would leave the house as soon as they went into heat and they would either come back wounded or not return at all. Pets rarely survive out on the streets."

Apart from pets, the view can be stretched towards stray animals as well since navigating the streets can be a difficult proposition for young animals and hence not many end up reaching adult age.

Others are drawn to the decision of neutering their pets due to health concerns.

"When my four-month-old cat went into heat, I had to constantly comfort her. She would be wailing all night long but I could not imagine letting her out to mate because she was too young to survive pregnancies without health complications. I genuinely believe if you are going to take full responsibility for a pet, you must be willing to go through with neutering," says Nishat Tasneem, as she talks about her pet cat who has now turned three. She also reiterates Tashfeen's point regarding how unfriendly the outside world can be to strays.

While controlling the feral population being an important factor, Ramim Rahman*, a caregiver for multiple cats for around 16 years, feels that all the benefits in regards to neutering, especially for cats, revolve around the convenience of humans. He talks about how most caregivers of indoor male cats stop giving them exercise and start overfeeding them.

"On the topic of cats, the benefits for female cats make more sense. Cat birth can have a lot of complications plus cats that have not been spayed enter a constant cycle

of breastfeeding and pregnancy that puts a lot of pressure on the body," he mentions while adding that there really is no right answer when it comes to this topic.

Apart from cats, other animals also share similar health issues when it comes to pregnancies. Ramiza Nausheen Zaman, who cares for five dogs at the moment, shares, "Our female dog was suffering as she was growing old and could not handle childbirth. Since that was heartbreaking for both my family and the other dogs, we decided to neuter our male dog." According to her, neutering is the right decision based on what is right for the pet's health.

Like Ramiza and Ramim, many are on the fence as well. Some feel that it's unfair to the animals because they cannot relate to us whether this is something they want or not. While others reconcile with their beliefs in order to deal with the safety concerns as unneutered pets living in high-rise buildings pose the risk of them wandering in search of a mate and facing potential accidents or if the pet wanders into a busy street while searching for a mate.

Since merely anecdotal pieces of evidence alone cannot be used to reach a conclusion when it comes to the topic of neutering an animal, Dr. Luthfor Rahman, an Upazila Livestock Officer who was previously stationed as a Veterinary Surgeon for Central Veterinary Hospital in Dhaka, explains the importance of neutering, particularly for indoor pets.

"Neutering manages the actions of the pets which include putting a stop to their territorial behaviours. When it comes to cats, the territorial behaviours include spraying which can be quite potent as they are filled with pheromones," he says.

In this case, people might argue that the step seems to be taken in favour of the caregivers and not the pets. To that, Dr. Rahman adds, "If you have an unneutered pet in the house, and if that animal keeps spraying everywhere, you are more likely to let that pet go. And if you let that pet go out on the streets, you put its life at risk."

He also sheds light on the medical benefits associated with neutering. "Neutering can prevent STDs, infections, tumours, and cancers of the reproductive system. These conditions are prevalent among more than 50 percent of the population and the risks increase with age."

The medical benefits are also reflected in Gerry Polton's publication *Mammary Tumours in Dogs*, which states that "Early spaying significantly reduces the risk of the development of mammary tumours in female dogs. The incidence of mammary tumours in unspayed female dogs is 71 percent

(of which approximately 50 percent will be malignant and 50 percent will be benign), but if a dog is spayed before its first heat cycle, the risk of developing a mammary tumour is reduced to 0.35 percent — a 99.5 percent reduction."

Perhaps you started reading this article hoping to find an answer to this dilemma. Unfortunately, there isn't a proper one. There really is no right or wrong answer as this is a complex issue to begin with. However, the right thing to do for your pet, or the neighbourhood stray you look out for, would be to solely assess their particular situation and make a decision based on that.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

Reference

Irish Veterinary Journal (April 2, 2015). *Mammary Tumours in Dogs.*

Tasnim Odrika has only one personality trait and that is cats. Share ideas for new personality traits with her at odrika_02@yahoo.com





ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

The BBA Boom in Bangladesh

I
 The HSC batch of 1991 is a special batch in Bangladesh. Some students from this batch enrolled in the first Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program in what was then the Department of Business Administration at Jahangirnagar University, in 1992.

The following year, IBA of the University of Dhaka joined the bandwagon. North South University was launched the same year. The BBA then, and still now, remains their flagship program.

With Bangladesh enjoying economic growth since the 1990s, the corporate sector started to rise. They needed business graduates. It was not possible for JU, DU and NSU alone to meet this increased demand. Other universities throughout Bangladesh started BBA programs.

Three decades later, in 2021, there is perhaps no university in Bangladesh that does not offer a BBA program.

II
 As the BBA program proliferated, the degree started to become specialised. BBA in Finance, Marketing, Accounting and other disciplines came out. Further specialisation came with an additional minor or a dual major. These are time consuming, but candidates had to show that they were special in the face of competition.

In an open-credit program, increased enrolment can be addressed by offering multiple sections of the same course. When a university pursues this strategy, it raises challenges. Different sections have different teachers, carrying out different assessments.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

When advising, students may not get the “best” teacher. Sometimes, some specialised courses cannot be offered in one semester. These require teachers with special training or experience. Thus, some students wait until it is offered. This can contribute to added time.

Scarcity is the essence of value in labour markets. Those who enrolled at JU, DU and NSU in the early 90s were scarce. A CGPA of say 3.9 out of 4.0 was a good signal to get a good placement in the job market. Today, there are more than 150 universities in Bangladesh, where the top-students may be achieving 3.9 in each of them.

What was glittering as gold before enrolment can easily evaporate into air sooner than one may think.

III
 A young person chooses a subject influenced by their peers and elders. They are also influenced by a question: What type of job may I get once I finish? They see the job market now, but lose sight that they will enter it at least four years from today. The skills they learn today in classes may not be relevant by that time.

The rise of the BBA program in Bangladesh in the last three decades raises an important question for itself and all other undergraduate programs. Over time, they have tried to adapt. Experience may have been mixed, but they have tried. This is where other programs can learn.

Those who are clever and keep their eyes open, will adapt. Those who don't will move along with the status quo. A generation or two ago, this was not a problem. Not many people studied in universities. Bangladesh was not a country with the opportunities it has today. It was possible to develop skills after joining a career. Today that is no longer possible.

The challenge remains the same for all Bachelor's programs. It would be wrong to isolate BBA programs. What role are our universities playing in preparing their students for the next stage in life?

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

How *not* to react to compliments

BUSHRA ZAMAN

Imagine you're sitting in a cafeteria, minding your own business, and suddenly a friend shows up who you haven't seen in ages. They greet you, even hug you, and proceed to compliment you.

What do you do then?

As someone who has yet to master the art of receiving compliments, I'm afraid the only way I can help you is by telling you exactly what *not* to do.

Get aggressive? No.

The last thing you want to do is get defensive and deny that the compliment is true. You may be your own worst critic, but hey, even if that is the case, you do not have to go out of your way to prove your flaws to a stranger.

When someone says, “You look so pretty!” you shouldn't reply with, “It's because the colour of the dress is so nice.” You might be challenging them to take on your low self-esteem and argue against the compliment. Winning this spat might technically sound like a response to a compliment, but no. *What exactly are you trying to win here?*

Run away? Don't.

This is basically the “flight” mode of the fight or flight response that gets triggered in situations of survival -- and properly reacting to a compliment requires survival



of the fittest.

Nodding and running away after being complimented might sound reasonable because you are technically sparing the person from having to listen to you mumble awkward responses. In reality,

however, it only makes you seem crazy, rude, or worse, both.

Also, this technique cannot be applied everywhere. You could be complimented in a crowded area, thus preventing you from running away. What then?

Pretend not to hear the compliment? Wow.

You know the trick where you make a person repeat the same things over and over until they're fed up and quit talking?

For example, before when I was complimented, I would zone out while trying to think of a response. Now, I just ask them to repeat what they said while explaining that I did not hear them, over and over again. Eventually, they think I'm crazy and cease to compliment me again for a while, saving the both of us some serious awkwardness.

It is pretty efficient in terms of saving time trying to figure out a response to the compliment too.

Make random noises? Really?

Laughing or giggling continuously at how ridiculous the compliment sounds to you is not a very logical response mostly because others may view you as maniacal. Same goes for choking on your own breath out of shock of hearing nice things said about you, or pretending to have the hiccups so you don't have to respond.

We get it. You just want to escape, not sound confused or silly, even though it may sound like doing so will keep the compliments from coming.

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

FABLE FACTORY

GREY PALETTE

NUJHAT ASLAM NIEON

A palette of sensation I take,
 Smearred with shades of cool and grey
 Portraying her in an unperceived canvas.

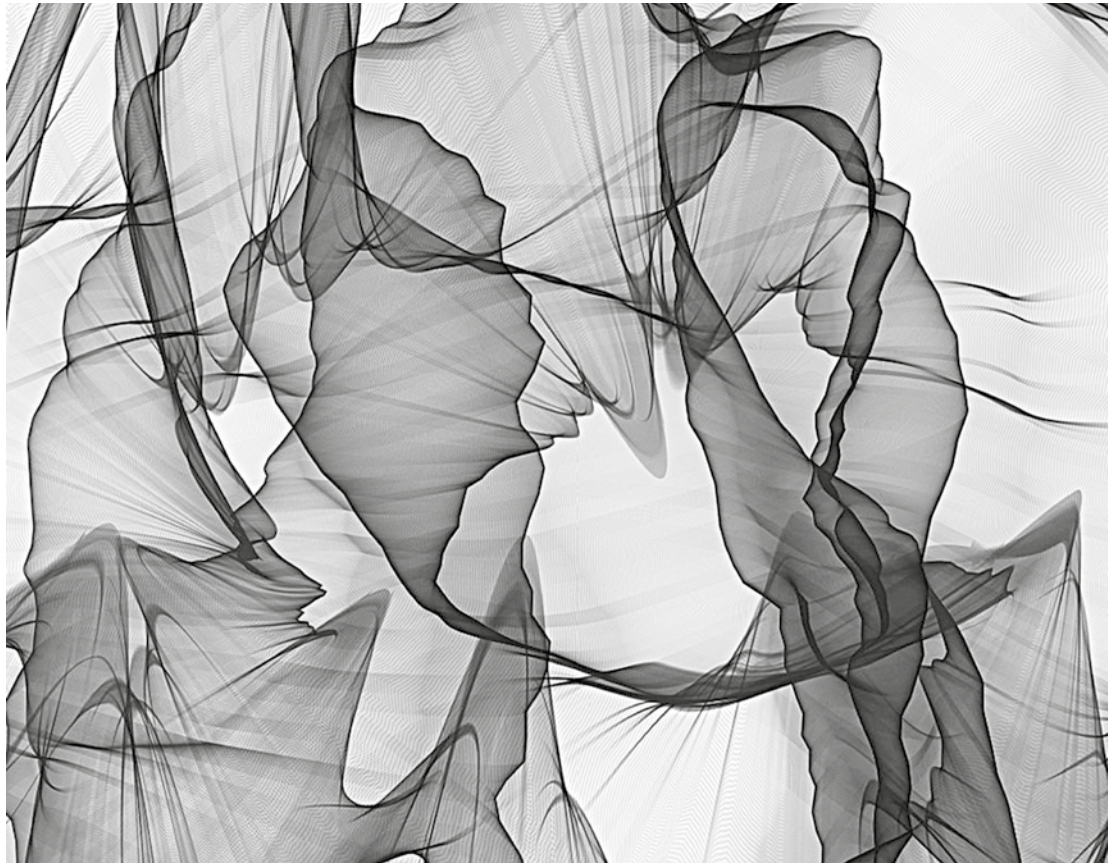
I count all the shades of grey,
 In a world of black and white they stay
 Blended with ambiguous truth, enshrouded.

Glad her eyes can't be deciphered,
 Dark like the shadows that prowl
 In the realms of my monochromatic world.

A world where seasons have no colour
 Ocean and sky embrace each other
 Leaves live and wither, reflecting the same shade.

I paint all and sundry devoid of colour,
 The world unfolds the shade coral
 To be most favoured for her lips.

As I fail to see her true colours,
 I paint her with my grey palette
 With a coral stain subtly left for the lips.



3 Degrees

AAQIB HASIB

They didn't see it coming. Or at least, that's what they wanted you to believe. After all, does it really matter, if it isn't going to be your world that drowns?



June 2042. That's the first day the floods came but never left. For over a decade, politicians and billionaires had told the world it would be alright. Things were under control.

Every village that suffered from an increasingly devastating flash flood each year, would be taken care of. That funds would be provided, by both the authorities and the rich.

Can't you see that every year we donate \$10 million to climate change?

Without our factories, where would we get the money to do such incredible acts of charity?

It's not as simple as you think. Without money coming in first, we'll never be able to solve the crisis.

I don't know where they are now. I don't know where anyone is anymore. It's been four years since the first floods, and now, I cannot even find myself.

October 9, 2044. That's the day I had to leave my mother behind. Her body had grown too weak from the dense toxic air in Dhaka. In her final moments, she asked me not to go looking for a doctor, as medical facilities had long since stopped existing. Instead, she begged me to go find my sister in Dinajpur.

We had a long journey together. Spanning almost two years, as we made it from Koyra to Khulna, where we were able to take refuge in my paternal grandparent's home for nearly a year, before the waves once again came and crashed our dreams down to nothing.

From Khulna, we had to fight our way to Dhaka. We lost all our money in the process. But what value does paper notes carry in a world that's slowly burning everything to a crisp, while simultaneously

drowning it?

The world was drowning. But my world drowned the day I had to leave my mother behind.

I didn't want to. But my mother told me that good sons listen to their mother, and her last wish was for me to find my sister, and hopefully weather out the storm.

When I hear my mother's last words over and over again in my head, on sleepless nights and afternoons where I collapse crying, all I could think is that this storm would not end.

Somewhere down the line, we all decided that things would be fine. That the numbers weren't that bad, and the planet would just reset, and save itself. That a few extra coal plants and brick kilns were fine, as long as they boosted the GDP by a few extra points.

Maybe some miraculous power would save us from the ticking time bomb.

Surely one more year of endless consumerism and increasing profits wouldn't end the world?

???? ??, 2045. As I drag myself through Balurghat, I know I won't make it. My sister is too far and my body is much too weak. I've lost track of dates. Travelling at night is my only option, as during the day, the red hot sun will burn anything in sight.

There's nothing left in my body to give. Nothing to push me forward. I collapse on my back, staring up at the night sky one last time. My mother's whisper to me to go find my sister.

I'm sorry, ma.

Aaqib will someday finish writing all of his pending stories. But not today. Write to him at aaqib.hasib@thedailystar.net

The Emotional Side of Dieting

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Like many other overweight Bangladeshi teenagers, I too, was relentlessly fat shamed out of “concern for my health” by everyone. From relatives to peers, it seemed like everyone had something to say. So, I decided to throw in the towel and surrender to a series of unfortunate attempts at dieting.

I say unfortunate because the Bangladeshi “dieting” scene revolves around handing out a pre-made or slightly customised diet plan that lists what you must eat and what you must avoid, and when. My numerous attempts at losing weight told me how many almonds to eat a day but did not tell me why I keep finding myself binge eating whenever I am stressed.

Our unhealthy eating habits and, in extreme cases, eating disorders, are greatly impacted by emotional and psychological factors. Furthermore, many people struggling to maintain a healthy weight through dieting may be emotional eaters. Emotional eating is a condition where the person suffering from it tends to eat whenever they feel fluctuations in their emotional state.

In my experience of going through a whole host of dieticians over the years, not one person mentioned my emotional well-being while dieting, or referred to my relationship with food. Never did they mention that my relationship with food might not be improving because I have mental blocks that I need to overcome. Instead, they told me that “I am bad at dieting.”

When I pointed out to them that I might be an emotional eater and asked for advice, it was dismissed with an offhand comment along the lines of, “Oh, everyone is an emotional eater, it’s all about will power so just stick to the diet.”

Stick to the diet, they said. However, is it reasonable to expect someone to follow a strict diet when the person in question cannot make a distinction between emotional eating and eating out of genuine hunger?

Although people seem to be becoming more health

conscious day-by-day, the general understanding of following a diet plan in Bangladesh often includes skipping meals to “lose weight.” Therefore, in a typical Bangladeshi dieting scene, with its preconceived notion that people struggling with weight issues are just lazy and lack will power, there is also a lack of emotional support for people who are seeking to make changes in their lifestyles and eating habits.

Diane Robinson, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist, and program director of Integrative Medicine at Orlando Health said in her interview with *PsychCentral* that, “Most people focus almost entirely on the physical aspects of weight loss, like diet and exercise. But there is an emotional component to food that the vast

Tasnim Nishat Islam, a 23-year-old university student going through a weight loss journey says, “When my weight didn’t change after a few months of dieting, I was told it was because of mental issues although the dietician herself was not a psychologist, nor did she conduct a proper assessment to find out.”

majority of people simply overlook, and it can quickly sabotage their efforts.”

While some dieticians are ignorant of the emotional aspect of dieting, on the other side of the spectrum, there are some dieticians who use “eating disorder” as an excuse for their failing diet plans without a proper psychological assessment.

Tasnim Nishat Islam, a 23-year-old university student going through a weight loss journey says, “When my weight didn’t change after a few months of dieting, I was told it was because of mental issues although the dietician herself was not a psychologist, nor did she conduct a proper assessment to find out.”

Sabekun Nahar Mumu, a practicing dietician at Evercare Hospital Dhaka says, “Certified dieticians in Bangladesh are trained on patient counselling but the training is not extensive or practical enough for them to treat patients with eating disorders. They are expected to refer such patients to a psychologist. The problem here is that the number of psychologists in Bangladesh

who deal with eating disorders is not sufficient.”

People who go to dieticians are often people who have experienced body shaming to some extent and are sensitive to judgmental comments. This is why it is especially important that practicing dieticians take the emotional side of dieting more seriously, so that people do not end up being misdiagnosed or have their concerns dismissed without assessment.

Tunzida Yousuf Chhonda, Managing Director and CEO at Cfitz women’s fitness centre, who also works as a fitness expert, mentions, “Well reputed dieticians have the psychological training necessary to deal with emotional eaters. However, I have my doubts that some may not be as adequately equipped or trained as others. This needs to change, whether it is a curricular issue or a training issue, the field needs to adopt the psychological effects of emotional eating into its territory.”

Mumu also points out that although graduates from food and nutrition who go into the clinical side are given training through an internship period, it is not widely available or enforced everywhere.

For this field to take into consideration the emotional and psychological side of dieting, it is imperative for dieticians to receive better training and practice empathy towards the clients they help. Otherwise, they may end up doing more harm than good.

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When Tazreen is not pretending to be a high-brow literary critic, she quite likes Rupi Kaur’s poetry collections. Send verbal eye-rolls at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

