



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Travelling in buses shouldn't be this hard.

MALIK ARAF

My father used to be an avid user of local transport in Dhaka. He wasn't the only one. To this day, many people are heavily reliant on buses. My father believes the entire process of taking on Dhaka's traffic, with the complicated array of options offered by bus companies, is a skill that everyone should learn.

I personally think he's wrong. Here's why.

Ask anyone what's wrong with the transport system in Bangladesh, and they will state their unmeasurable frustration about how the buses operate daily. When I was growing up, the influence of Hollywood movies gave me an idea about how buses work in general. I thought it encompassed listening to music peacefully, no noisy traffic and, if luck favours, a couple of friends for the ride.

But I soon came to know that the situation in Bangladesh is very different. As a university student myself, buses are now my only means of transportation. While I have learned to use them, the experience has been borderline dreadful.

In my personal experience, I never find any specific points to get on a bus, and the bus I'm trying to get on just randomly stops in places. There have been countless times where I had to run and battle through ravaging motorcycles, cars, and other traffic to get on a bus. I honestly don't know how I survived. To make matters worse, sometimes the bus doesn't stop. I mean, what's up with the driver never wanting to hit the brakes?

Furthermore, the bus conductor pretends like everything is fine. I clearly remember that I once asked a conductor to instruct the driver to stop

the bus while picking up passengers because getting on a running bus is risky. I even told him that my shoulders collided with the door and I was hurt. He brushed off my statement and told me I needed to man up.

For a vehicle that big in size, the buses are surprisingly very compact inside. For a person with average height, even I find them overly uncomfortable. The leg space is barely enough, and the conductor always manages to overcrowd the buses even if they charge you more for your seats. So any space you can salvage is quickly given to a different passenger.

The passengers are also full of surprises. Every time I sit next to someone, they always manage to occupy every bit of space between the seats and make sure they get a glimpse of what I am doing on my phone. Well, who can blame them when I have Arnob on repeat?

So, I can't entirely agree with my father when he says this is a necessary skill to learn. Travelling in buses shouldn't be this hard. Commuting against the Dhaka traffic is like riding a roller coaster – a roller coaster capable of breaking you from the inside.

With new initiatives being taken, we can only hope things change from here. My father hopes too. For once, if this changes, I know he would gladly accept he was wrong.

Menstruating for the first time

AYRA AREEBA ABID

I still remember the first time I calmly went to my Ma and informed her that I got my first period. I was still a kid, but my mom said, "My baby's all grown up now" in an emotional voice.

To say that the first experience can be overwhelming for menstruators is justified. However, there are people who never really get prior education and so almost always end up panicking.

It's scary to gain first experiences in life, but it's even scarier to not have a proper guide about what to do beforehand. When I was younger, I heard a story from someone who never knew what menstruation really is, and so went to their dad when they first started menstruating. She had a hard time understanding and came to the only rational conclusion she could come to at that moment, that maybe she got hurt. Her dad, perhaps unable or reluctant to explain, said that they should talk to her sister or mother instead. Since then, I wondered why this is such a hard topic to talk about, especially for most men in our households.

Before I started menstruating, I remember telling my cousins who are much older than me that my mom talked to me about periods and told me to be calm and not frightened when the time comes. She said that it's a normal process and so my very young mind registered that, thankfully.

However, when my cousins began acting awkward and tried to suppress their laughter for some odd reason, I first came to the revelation that maybe this is something I should not talk openly about. However, my mom did not tell me about this taboo. I learned of the taboo surrounding menstruation as I grew up.

Since I live in a joint family, I always witnessed my *chachi* at *sehri* not disclosing to my *chacha* that their daughter started her period and so would not be able to observe her fast. The matter was closed at something along the lines of, "...she could not wake up."

During the day, she'd always have her meals in her bedroom behind closed doors. This, unfortunately, is a common practice in many households. No one expects anyone to bring up a healthy conversation about periods because they just don't wish to.

This taboo seeped into our community ages ago, and has since passed down from generation to generation. When it comes to menstruation, some people's lips are tightly pursed. They simply don't want to raise their voices to normalise something that should naturally be normal. Now, the younger generation and I can only hope that one day, we can see a world where no one fears menstruation.

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