



JALEBI, SAREE, SAMOSA:
WHEN DID WE BECOME TOO
GOOD FOR BANGLA?

PG 3

DHAKA NEEDS A CITY
SCHOOL BUS SERVICE,
NOW!

PG 6



DAZED AND CONFUSED

The adolescent reproductive health conundrum

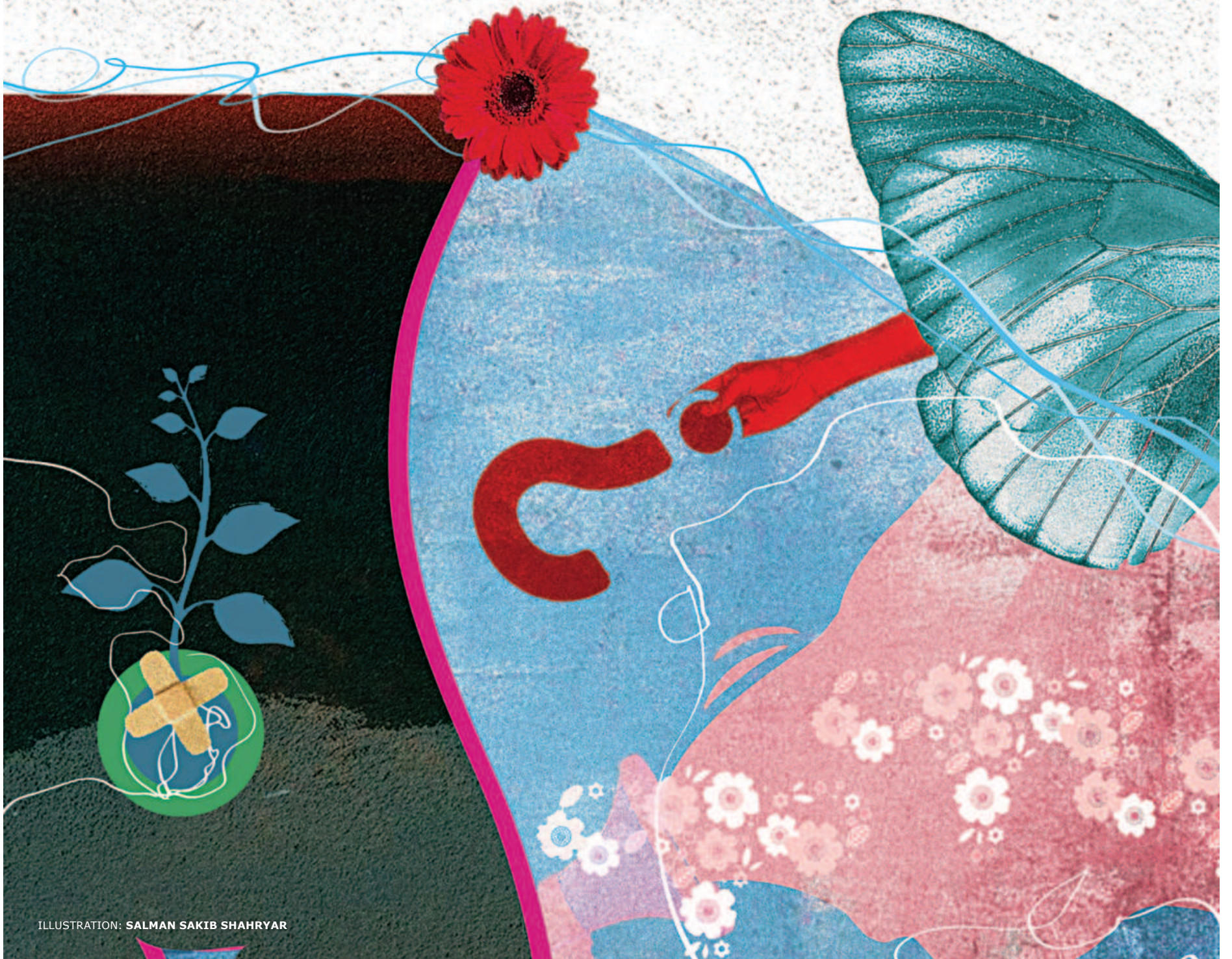


ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

EDITORIAL

Whenever we talk about shortfalls in our education system here at SHOUT, I like to draw on my own experience in school. It was good in many ways, but like almost every schoolkid in the country, I was not taught anything about reproductive health. The breadth of problems born out of this unwillingness to talk about something so basic to the human experience would be difficult to summarise, so I won't attempt it. I'd just like to say that it caused a lot of problems. Scary amounts.

What I can share is one of the funniest stories I have in my bag of stories. I was a student in class 5. Our group of friends had collectively started to learn about how babies were made, and new knowledge of that process were smuggled in from various untrustworthy sources every day, only to be diligently distributed by the troublemakers in class. Upon disclosure to a certain specific (one which we eventually found out was true), a friend burst into an angry tirade, almost to the verge of tears, and confidently claimed that there was no way his parents could have engaged in such lowly activity.

I still laugh at this memory.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

MOVIES



Embracing period and puberty with *Turning Red*

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

After years of watching the likes of talking animals and scheming toys, I went in expecting something that centres the power of friendship and not much else. To my surprise, the simple story was a treasure trove of representation across race, gender and culture. The setting or characterisation of the film doesn't limit the relatability factor.

Turning Red follows 13-year-old Chinese-Canadian Mei Lee as she navigates life in Toronto in the early 2000s. Like any pubescent girl, her life revolves around school, friends, crushes, and boy bands. One day, her life changes forever as she wakes up as a giant red panda and subsequently discovers that the transformation is only triggered when she has an intense emotional response. She later learns this is hereditary for the women in her maternal family.

Mei is alarmed and embarrassed by the sudden change her body is undergoing and desperately tries hiding it from her family. Her mother, Ming Lee, mistakes her daughter's refusal to come out of the bathroom as the arrival of her first period and shows up with an arsenal of period products, attempting to have the uncomfortable but necessary conversation regarding menstruation – a universal experience.

This is a huge step forward not just for Pixar (20 of their 24 films feature a male protagonist), but for mainstream animation as it normalises female puberty for a wider audience. The above-mentioned scene alone encourages children to embrace the messy side of puberty, the emotional extremes and hormonal changes, something I didn't know how to do because the media portrays female growth with just sexualised glow-ups.

At this point, it becomes obvious that

Mei's transformation to a red panda is essentially a metaphor for getting your first period, growing body hair, riding the emotional roller-coaster and being thrust into the awkward stage of puberty.

However, the film is also about a teen's complicated relationship with her mother. It incorporates generational trauma in a way that's much more relatable to not just Asians but to everyone who grew up feeling the weight of familial expectations.

The movie includes the very Asian trope of being the overachieving child but, instead of falling into any clichés, it explores the inner conflict of choosing whether to express one's individuality or keep moulding oneself according to their parents' expectations, something we deshi kids face daily.

Mei never complains about the pressures of being the perfect child. However, her sense of individuality threatens to rear its head every now and then, which leads to problems with her strict, traditional mother. The best part is, not once was it conveyed that Ming's love for her daughter was conditional. She had a fierce love for her family despite projecting her own trauma onto Mei.

Inside Out took a whimsical approach to teen angst. *Encanto* disguised generational trauma under a magical facade. With *Turning Red*, however, Pixar takes the coming-of-age arc giving it a realistic and personal makeover, refusing to succumb to the often dreamy media portrayal of growing up.

The result? An allegorical gem that masterfully captures the struggles of adolescence.

Mashiyat Nayeem is mourning the end of online school and the extra hour of sleep. Send her condolences at mashiyat.nayeem@gmail.com

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
Black Summer	Tightrope
Red Hot Chili Peppers	ZAYN
Love & Hate	Philosophize
Michael Kiwanuka	Parekh & Singh
Black Hole Sun	Achilles, Come Down
Soundgarden	Gang of Youths
Doin' Time	In The Woods Somewhere
Lana Del Rey	Hozier

Email us at shoutds@gmail.com with feedback, comments, and reader submissions within 500 words.

Jalebi, Saree, Samosa

When did we become too good for Bangla?

FABIHA AFIFA

"It just doesn't sit well in your mouth, ma."

My mom said, referring to a very simple Bangla word I used in our conversation as I was explaining the Jeffrey Epstein case to her: faash, the Bangla word for "expose".

She almost looked proud as she said it, proud that she feels her daughter has a bit of an American accent. Proud that a foreign, secondary language seemingly sounds more natural from my mouth than my own native language.

I don't blame her though. Asian societies in general tend to mimic Eurocentric cultures, albeit very selectively.

If we only consider a large part of our society's preference of English over Bangla, it is hard to pinpoint the exact moment this started. During the British Raj, going to study abroad or being fluent in English was a luxury only the wealthiest could afford and thus, these became symbols of class and status.

After 1971, Bengalis had an entire country to mould to fit their identity. Unfortunately, pre-existing societal notions led to people undermining their own culture and by the 1990s, English medium schools were being established all over the country and became affordable to many.

English is undoubtedly important. It is the universal language but because of our over-emphasis on the language, Bangla is often neglected in English medium school curricula at best and openly denounced at worst. As a student of that system myself, the number of times I have heard of schools berating students for speaking in

Bangla within school premises is alarming.

This discouragement and neglect of Bangla only fosters the same sense of cultural inferiority in students' minds and ultimately leads to many dismissing Bangla as being too hard or simply "uncool". I have even heard excuses like, "Well, I won't need Bangla in my professional life."

What hurts more than this detachment of the youth from our culture and language is perhaps the youth's attempt in distorting it to fit with Eurocentric standards. Common Bangla words are now replaced by their Hindi counterparts because those words are better known to the Western audience.

Culture and language are ever evolving, yes. Bangla does have words of various languages from all over the world, yes. However, those words came in organically to make the language more adaptable and widen its vocabulary and not whitewash it or mutate it to appease people's need to conform to standards of other cultures.

There is still hope, though. Hope is perhaps what has kept this nation standing after centuries of foreign rule and as we finally hold our future in our own hands, it is important for us to break free from the shackles put on our minds, our pride.

Bangla is not inferior to English, Hindi, or Urdu. We are good enough and it is about time we restore our heritage and language instead of "diversifying" it to a point it is not even itself anymore.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Fabiha Afifa is secretly a Lannister noblewoman and a Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance/soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com

Our concerns about the Metaverse

ZAHEEN TASFIA ZUHAIR

Dystopian sci-fi is coming to life.

Here's the sci-fi part: Mark Zuckerberg is working on the Metaverse, a fully immersive augmented reality experience. If his vision comes true, you will be able to use your VR headset and travel Meta's virtual world as an avatar. You will be interacting with other people's avatars, buying virtual clothes. You will even be able to get married online.

Here's the dystopian part of this ordeal. Most of Facebook's critics think the Metaverse is just another scheme to get our time and money. Given Meta's record of knowing the damage its platforms causes and not doing anything about it, most people are siding with critics.

Firstly, safety has to be built into the Metaverse, a point Zuckerberg has emphasised. Unfortunately, Andrew Bosworth, Meta's Chief Technology Officer, says moderation of content in the Metaverse is practically impossible. Even if they tried to regulate, Meta would have to monitor every interaction in their virtual universe. Privacy is a huge concern here, especially if EMG, or electromyographic technology, is integrated.

EMG could detect and intercept nerve impulses and translate it into the corresponding signals in the virtual space. So the thought of moving your fingers in



enough to send texts. The catch is, your brain activity will need to be monitored by Meta.

How much do you want to trust them?

Even scarier, have you seen the deepfake of Zelenskyy asking Ukrainians to surrender? Thankfully, people noticed glitches and realised the video was fake. But Meta is developing highly realistic avatars. Someone could impersonate you by customising their avatar to look just

like you. If they carry out cybercrimes, you could be blamed. Getting hacked will be more terrifying than ever.

Additionally, cyber-bullying may only get worse. And not just because spending all of one's time on social media without interacting with real people makes one insensitive and narcissistic.

Augmented reality will make you feel like you are in the real world. WION reported that a woman's avatar was groped

by another Metaverse user's avatar. When the woman asked the stranger to stop, he said it was the Metaverse and he could do whatever he wanted.

Then there's the concern about misinformation, fake news and propaganda. If people spend most of their life in the Metaverse, Zuckerberg essentially controls what they see. One who controls the flow of information controls the world. If someone controls the Metaverse... they can control our lives.

The people we meet, our relationships, will be decided by algorithms. The rise of dating apps correlates to the fall of long term-relationships. If one can look like however they want – be whoever they want – in the Metaverse, real life quickly loses appeal.

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Zaheen thinks watching productivity videos makes you automatically productive. Send help at [instagram.com/tasfiazuhair](https://www.instagram.com/tasfiazuhair)

The curse of being a “gifted child”

KOUSHIN UNBER

If you, as a kindergartener, thought classes were boring and lengthy, found yourself finishing sums way before the rest of your classmates, and passed tests with flying colours with minimum effort put into studying the night before, you tick all the boxes for being what the internet calls a “gifted child”.

While being a gifted child may seem enviable, the world often seems to overlook the difficulties this specific group of children face as they grow older and advance in their academic stages. These children usually have the innate ability to comprehend lessons and apply themselves in studies, along with being able to get to get away with spending a minimum amount of their time studying. That is where the biggest curse of being gifted comes in – the inability to develop proper study habits.

Often, these children realise that they do not need to study as much as their peers do in order to achieve the same grade, especially during the initial years of schooling. Though it seems like an advantage early on, it is only when they start settling into more advanced classes that they realise they have actually



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

begun to fall behind.

The student in question will continue to use their intuition to pass tests with minimal effort until the time comes when their intellect is no longer sufficient to handle the schoolwork and tests. And this usually happens when 8th grade rolls in, where the coursework becomes tougher, where regular, persistent studying is required in order to understand the lessons and do well in the tests.

And so this perceived gifted child now suffers from burnout and stress, as they struggle to understand why they are having a hard time coping with studies, and maintaining their usual grade levels.

Moreover, the superficial praises and glorification

of this group of children actually tend to do more harm than good in the long run. The words “You have a lot of potential,” are ones that are almost universal for every child perceived to be “gifted”. They are never taught how to truly unlock that “potential”. Parents and teachers inundate these individuals with compliments and place the burdens of expectations on them, but they never receive the proper professional assistance required to truly perform well.

You as a six-year-old are not mature enough to realise that you need to develop a proper work ethic in order to keep up with the rising difficulty of school all the way to college. The ultimate solution to this problem is the simple acceptance of the fact that only hard work can beget success. A head start will only get us that far if we do not continue to finish the rest of the road.

Koushin is your average leftist e-girl with crippling imposter syndrome. Send her video essays on indie films at: fb.com/omgitsunber

Why “fake it till you make it” works

AFIA IBNAT

The endless spiral of self-doubt that forces us to question our competence and sabotages the opportunities we could’ve taken is something that holds many of us back. Lucky for us, there’s a way that could get us out of this anxiety-induced downward spiral.

You’ve probably heard of the oft-cited advice “Fake it till you make it.” Over the years, the phrase has lost its novelty and now sounds like clichéd advice you’d find in a pastel-themed carousel on your Instagram explore page.

Fake it till you make it, or counter-attitudinal advocacy in social psychology terms, is essentially a method of tricking yourself into thinking you can accomplish the things you set your heart out to do. Once you communicate something counter to what you believe in, it can slowly help change your original belief.

Now, this isn’t supposed to be used in an “Anna Delvey scamming the entirety of New York City” kind of way, but more in a “I don’t think I can do this but I’ll trick my brain into thinking I can” kind of way.

Here’s how this works: you catch yourself losing sleep over something you just can’t get yourself to do. It can be a presentation that you’re blanking on or a paper that isn’t writing itself. This is when you hear a record scratch in your head, stop in your tracks, and deploy your weapons.

Imagine that you’ve hired a lawyer and their sole job is to convince a jury of all the reasons you can finish the task you’re currently struggling with. Your lawyer has to use everything in their arsenal to



make your case – maybe you’ve previously crunched before your deadlines and made it work, maybe you’ve practised your speech so many times you can now recite it in your sleep, or perhaps you’re just an all-around remarkable person who’s dead set on achieving their goals.

Now that you’ve established a case and sufficiently empowered yourself, it’s time to actually put in the work. When you end up delivering your speech after you thought you were too shy to speak in

public, your brain registers public speaking as a skill you possess.

When you force yourself to argue for something you don’t believe in, such as yourself, your brain ends up believing you because it hates pegging you as a liar. Your mind can soften towards views you’re arguing for – doesn’t matter whether you initially believed so or not. Repeated reaffirmation convinces your brain to forgo the previous mindset where you underestimated yourself.

Constantly suffering from self-doubt and second guessing your abilities can get tiring. In a world where lawyers are expensive to hire, we need to be our own advocates. In the end, perhaps tricking ourselves into unlocking our potential is one of the most authentic things we can do.

Afia Ibnat is trying to gaslight herself into being productive. You too can gaslight her at afiaibnat09@gmail.com

DAZED AND CONFUSED

The adolescent reproductive health conundrum

TASNIM ODRIKA

“I had never really put much thought into what reproductive health is and this interview is the first time I actually decided to Google what the term really means.”

This was the response I received from 18-year-old A Level candidate Eliza Tahmida Sultana, when asked about what she knew about the topic of reproductive health.

This is a tale as old as time. Lack of information regarding an important developmental aspect of one’s life leading to helplessness and confusion.

According to a report published by UNICEF, one-fifth of Bangladesh’s population is comprised of adolescents. Despite being such a large portion of the population, there is lack of services tending to their health problems. Adolescents in our country still have limited knowledge about reproductive health issues and limited access to accurate information. And while textbooks and curriculum include content about reproductive health, schools and teachers are by and large reluctant to teach these topics. As a result, the majority of adolescents have no idea about the changes associated with puberty (e.g. menstruation or wet dreams) until they experience them.

When it comes to any sort of education on reproductive health, 17-year-old O Level candidate Shanum Sarkar shared, “We had very strictly educational Biology classes from 10th grade. Before that, we were not even allowed to flip through the reproduction chapter in our books.” She further adds how bizarre it was since many girls would start going through puberty at the age of nine.

This seemed a common response from the various teenagers interviewed for the article where education of reproductive health by schools was restricted to the pages of the Biology books only, and the teenagers ended up merely learning bookish knowledge of the reproductive organs but nothing about their reproductive health.

Besides schools, the other place where adolescents seek information from is their parents, but the scenario there also seems to be bleak for the majority of the teenagers.

“I didn’t know about menstruation until fourth grade when a classmate told me about it, and all she knew about it was that it was a normal phenomenon and that it ‘happens to every girl’.” When I got my first period, I was just handed sanitary napkins and was taught how to dispose of them and that was the extent of the information I received. I was not told what colours or changes in the consistency of my period might indicate or what not having it at some point might mean. I also wasn’t sure how children were conceived until seventh grade and the way I learned that definitely isn’t commendable,” mentioned 18-year-old Fabiha Afifa, student at Maple Leaf International School.

The last resort for these teenagers when it comes to receiving information about their own bodily issues would be healthcare providers. Even there, dispersing relevant information seems to be hurdled with stigma and proper information regarding reproductive health seem to be confined to married individuals only. Doctors are often visibly reluctant



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

on sharing pertinent information with adolescents.

For Shanum, an undiagnosed eating disorder-related issue leading to disruption in her menstrual cycle had required her to visit a gynaecologist.

“The first thing the doctor asked me was my marital status. Considering I was 13 or 14 years old back then, I found the question to be quite absurd and it made me wonder why they couldn’t just ask if I was sexually active,” she recalled.

Apart from the lack of knowledge about tending to their own reproductive health, puberty itself becomes a confusing period to navigate through for many. With so many changes taking place in their bodies, many find it hard to understand which changes are normal and which ones aren’t. Although many of the adolescents spoken to for the article did seem to have a solid grasp of the biological basis of puberty, they still struggled to cope with the changes themselves not having an adult with the proper knowledge to walk them through this difficult time period.

“During my puberty, I suffered from insecurity because I had hair growing in places where girls don’t usually have hair,” commented Eliza, adding that it was a hormonal issue but she felt the need to cover these hairs out of embarrassment. On the other hand, Shanum disclosed how acne during her teenage years and a growth spurt that everyone would point out had made her feel ashamed and uncomfortable.

But, if not from schools, homes, or healthcare providers, where were these teenagers getting their information from? It seemed social media posts and Google searches were their main teachers. For youths barely starting to traverse the big bad world of the internet, this clearly is not a sustainable option.

For male adolescents, the situation seems slightly direr with an even lower

level of awareness regarding male reproductive health. Many female participants spoken to also had the idea that reproductive health was confined to the females.

This idea was reiterated by 15-year-old O Level candidate Inqiad Bin Ali’s response, where he said, “Personally, I thought reproductive health is related to the processes that lead to conception and hence initially, I used to think it was only relevant to women. But I later found out, due to my own puberty and Biology lessons, that men have a lot to learn as well.”

Although being just as confusing, the experiences of male puberty are slightly different than that of a female.

“I was aware that growing a beard was a common phenomenon during puberty but that’s something that has not happened to me yet. My first ejaculation was a terrifying experience for me. The growth of hair from around my genitals and armpits made me feel embarrassed as well,” Inqiad goes on to share his experience going through puberty. He also shared how he kept all these facts hidden due to shame.

Shame regarding these changes is not uncommon and the stigma surrounding reproductive health seems to keep coming down to this idea of shame. This shame disrupts conversation about topics of reproductive health which further leads many adolescents to have undiagnosed health complications.

In a recent study by Kamrul-Hasan, ABM et al., polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is an emerging problem for Bangladeshi adolescents with 88 percent of the patients involved in the study having oligomenorrhea, 2.3 percent having primary amenorrhea, 6.9 percent having secondary amenorrhea, and 2.9 percent having polymenorrhea. The lack of understanding and knowledge also leads these adolescents to conceal the most basic bodily function.

Puberty for 17-year-old Aryana Zaman*

studying at Bangladesh International Tutorial (BIT) started at the age of nine. “The first time I got my period, I thought it was some kind of a disease resulting from dehydration. I was pretty scared at first and thought I was going to die. I hid the situation from my family for the first two days but obviously, they soon found out. And, although my family was supportive, I don’t think I received enough information about the whole process and I was even told to hide my menstruation from my friends and teachers,” she said.

The stigma is further extended to adolescents not conforming to the binary identities of males and females as most healthcare services are designed in a very binary manner. This population ends up facing unique barriers to receiving care due to being so vastly under-researched, according to Moseson et al.

It is crucial to impart proper knowledge to adolescents regarding their bodily changes. According to Inqiad, “If society had taught me about the physical and emotional changes I would go through during my teens, puberty would have been a lot easier to handle. Moreover, I would have been able to steer clear of harmful misconceptions.”

*Name has been changed for privacy.

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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

Why do prices increase every Ramadan?

I
According to Macrotrends, the population of Dhaka is more than 22 million. The most common food that sells in Dhaka is eggs. Even if one in two people eats an egg every day, the daily demand for eggs is over 11 million.

We will revisit this in a different guise.

II
Why do prices of “essentials” increase in Ramadan? Print, online, and social media reminds you how goods are becoming more and more expensive. The government tries its best to keep prices in check. Yet, prices keep rising, or settle at a plateau that is difficult for many to reach.

What are the “essentials” in your basket? When do you want these “essentials”? You probably want them at iftar, dinner, and sehri. If you do not get them at these times, you would be sad.

The truth is, there are many like you who will want those same essentials and would be willing to pay to get them early or on time. There is a silent auction going on. On the other side of the market, sellers are aware there are many like you



DESIGN: **KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

who demand that essential basket at a particular time. In an ideal Econ 101 world, the sellers arrive with that essential bundle. The market or equilibrium price is established. Alas! The real world is a bit

more complex.

III
“Essentials” are important in our story. Price alone does not determine their demand. We need those essentials during Ramadan. We need them at a specific time, as mentioned above.

Even if the sellers supply in good spirit, supplying to a population of 22 million per day is a challenge. There is another problem: geographical location.

The population of Dhaka is scattered over a geographical space. Supply points are located at strategic positions. If there is a delay in getting the essentials to the supply points, prices will rise. If there is a shortage in predicting the right amount of, say, edible oil, prices may rise again.

So far, we have assumed that the actors in this “essential” drama are acting in good faith. There is no reason to presume they would do so beforehand.

IV
If suppliers can control supply at a strategic location, they can control the price during the month of Ramadan. People

will buy their “essentials”. They know this very well. This is where the government enters the story.

Governments are the moral fabric that protect citizens from outside coercion. Sadly, all governments have an upper limit in their capacity to check unethical practices. Dhaka is a city larger than many countries of the world. This makes it a big challenge for the government to keep prices of “essentials” in check during Ramadan.

V
Price increase in Ramadan happens due to supply factors mentioned above. It also happens due to demand factors, because you and I are willing to pay to get our “essentials” basket on time. The moral issue of prices reaching a plateau that is too high for many families to reach is one that needs wider debate and awareness before it can be addressed effectively.

Asrar Chowdhury is a professor of Economics. He follows Test cricket, listens to music, and spins vinyls when he has free time. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Dhaka needs a city school bus service, now!

A student envisions what would make this scheme successful

HRISHIK ROY

8:45 AM

As I frantically looked at my watch to realise I was 35 minutes late for school, I cursed at the horrible Shahbagh traffic. To me, it was no less than an obnoxious, stubborn monster – one which I had to slay every morning.

In fact, it is not just me who has such sentiments about Dhaka’s crippling traffic, but rather thousands of school going students face similar adversities.

However, a solution has been proposed, one which is considered by many to be the light at the end of the tunnel – a city school bus service. This service is expected to reduce the number of school-bound private vehicles and thus decrease traffic during school hours. To make a transport service such as this successful, it has to be better than the private transport being currently used. It has to incentivise parents and students to ditch private transport for public transport service.

One way to ensure this is to make sure that the city school bus service is safe. Parents are extremely sceptical of the safety of public transportation as they often operate using questionable practices, including using unfit vehicles and hiring unqualified drivers. Such practices



PHOTO: **STAR**

have resulted in multiple fatalities over the years, eroding most parents’ trust in public bus services.

Thus, authorities need to strictly regulate these services, making sure that proper safety regulations are being followed. Students need to be safely dropped off and picked from designated bus stops. Experienced drivers have to be hired for such a service and malpractices, such as dropping students off a moving bus has to be prevented.

The bus service has to be cheaper than private transport, so that a majority of students can afford it. Subsidising such a service can mean lower fares for students. There also has to be a chart regarding the fares of the bus routes to ensure that the bus conductors are not charging students extra money. Convenient ticketing services like yearly or monthly passes should be offered as well.

Additionally, these buses have to be exclusively used for students and not

for regular fare collection. Once a bus is done for the day, it has to return to the bus depot to ensure proper maintenance. This is to ensure that these buses remain clean, with functional machinery and undamaged seats. A lot of students simply choose to opt for private transport, because they are much more comfortable than public transport services. Making sure that the buses are properly maintained and not overcrowded will mean that they are comfortable enough for students to use.

Public buses often tend to wait needlessly for passengers, causing a lot of unnecessary waste of time. However, such school buses will have to be punctual and only stop for a fixed period of time. Data from schools and colleges have to be used to chart routes which provide maximum coverage to students, while being efficient at the same time.

Like most development plans, the benefits of such a city school bus system can only be realised through proper implementation. If executed properly, such a service can go a long way in easing the woes of school students in the capital.

Hrishik thinks he is growing up to be a disappointing student. See him crying over his Chemistry lessons at hrdibbo@gmail.com

Love's Astronomy, fragment

AHMAD SALEH ABDULLAH

for SAP

When we dream of reality on yet unnamed moons
Do our dreams become just as untrue?
But I have felt the sand under my feet
And the warmth like you get on the beach.
I have felt the breeze hugging my chest,
The vapours condensing as sweat on my skin;
Nostalgia for a scent of a flower that you know on earth
but on a new moon seems like something else.
Fear grasped me. I felt homesick.
But soon the definition of home
Felt just as alien as the hypothetical rose.
I have seen two lovers on Uranus
Sitting by the ocean of diamonds.
I have seen the rings of Saturn on her fingers
And all his fear locked within Titan's heart.
But no star burns for us. No flower blooms
And kisses the air as I might've kissed you.
We are a nebulous cloud, nourished by the
Dust of the stars that burned before us.
We are a testimony that love never dies,
It travels through interstellar space
Hoping that someday it might bloom
Once again as the magnanimous sun.
[...]

Abdullah lives in a world as Finnegans Wake, roams through the dark alleys of Dostoyevsky's novels, and is always drunk on poetry like it's his Cutty Sark. Tell him Ça suffit at asab-dullah.ag@gmail.com



MY FIRST LOVE

TASFIYA HUSSAIN PRITHULA

Looking at the picture that his niece had drawn, Hillol let out a slight chuckle. The picture took him back to his old days. As a few moments of silence passed, Hillol was left staring at the sketch as if he was having a staring contest with that poor piece of paper. But the silence only lasted a few minutes, until it was broken by his niece who abruptly asked, "Uncle, how did you and Aunt Luna meet?" Hillol looked at his niece and all the children who were present there and saw their expectant faces.

At first Hillol hesitated, but a slight urge to speak up was stinging in his heart. He decided to answer the question, a question that he was always asked but chose not to answer. Deep inside, he was a little nervous, and he wondered to himself, "Where am I getting this courage?" He shrugged off these thoughts and finally started to confess.

It all started with one call. It was evening, the clock on the wall of the living room ticked to 7 o'clock. Hillol was sitting on the sofa, sipping his evening tea with a Humayun Ahmed book. Suddenly, the telephone on the tea table started to ring. Hillol huffed and closed his book and went to pick up the phone. He brought the speaker of the telephone to his right ear and after sighing he started the conversation with, "Hello! Who is this?"

After a few moments of silence he heard, "Come quickly to my house, pick me up, we are getting married."

He knew the person on the other end of the call. He knew her well, better than he knew anyone else. He knew the call was urgent, and he could tell he didn't have too much time. He only gave it a moment's thought, but he knew what he had to do. Without questioning anymore, he quickly left his home and went where he was needed. Where she was.

There he picked her up and again they set off, this time to the Kazi office. And after a few signatures,

some formalities, and a photo with smiling faces, they started a new phase of their life. Hillol himself couldn't believe what had happened, he looked at the beautifully dressed lady beside him who was now his wife.

As they were exiting the building, however, he suddenly realised something important. There was no way he could go home now. If he went there with his newly wedded wife, he had no idea how his family would react. But he could imagine it wouldn't be good. He did some quick thinking and decided to call his cousin and asked her to give them shelter for the night. Thankfully, his cousin was on-board, something that made him feel tremendous relief and happiness. He finally relaxed, and smiled.

A few days had passed, and Hillol found himself sitting at home, in the living room with a cup of tea in his hand once again. This time, however, it was made by his one and only wife. He entered a state of trance again, wondering how his life had changed so fast. How hard it was to convince his parents to accept his marriage, how the woman who was his sister's best friend became the centre of his life, how they playfully used to hang out when his sister was newly married. Those cautious dreams they exchanged with each other had finally come true.

"Yeah, that's it kids, that's how we met," he ended his real life story, finally finishing the answer to his niece's question. But he knew immediately that another question was going to be asked, as it always did, and he was right. Abruptly one of his nephew who was in his teens asked him, "Uncle will you not get married again?"

Hillol replied with a dry chuckle, "No dear, once was enough."

His nephew then again asked, "Why Uncle?"

Hillol was ready with his reply, "She was my first love, and until my last breathe she will be my first."

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How Studio Ghibli uses fantasy to deal with trauma

SARA KABIR

Studio Ghibli, the trail-blazing Goliath of the Japanese animation industry, has a house style that's hard to miss. Throughout its almost two dozen highly-acclaimed animated movies, Studio Ghibli has made its mark as one of the most successful animation companies in the world. While most people might trivialise by calling the movies "children's cartoons", they are so much more.

What sets Ghibli movies apart from their counterparts, and has gained them so much recognition worldwide, is their art style and the amount of time and thought put behind the details of the animations and stories. Each movie is masterfully crafted to portray deep and relevant issues interlinked.

The studio uses its signature style of beautifully drawn animations and whimsical fantasy storytelling to explore deeper topics of grief, loss, anxiety, deforestation, capitalism, the devastating consequences of war, the perils of growing up, and much more. They use fantasy as a lens through which they explore these hard-hitting, authentic themes to make them easily digestible for people of all ages. The way Ghibli uses fantasy to understand, normalise and deal with trauma in their whimsical, escapist movies is unparalleled.

While younger watchers might not instantly pick up on the subtle plotlines that explore these topics, older fans most likely will. Having been an avid Ghibli fan myself, as a child, I had initially fallen in love with the movies after seeing their mesmerising animations and all-consuming plots. Now that I'm older, however, with every single re-watch I appreciate the immaculately crafted world-building and the intricate storytelling a little more.

No matter what someone's age might be, there is always something to connect with and lessons to take away from these movies. A prime example of this is one of the Studio's first animated films, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

The movie starts with a university professor and his two young daughters moving to a small town to be closer to their mother who is in the hospital, recovering from a long-term illness. While cleaning up the old, rundown house they just moved into, the sisters realise that it seems to be inhabited by tiny, black soot spirits. Nearby in the forest lives a ginormous, fluffy forest spirit named Totoro. Here's the plot twist, only the young sisters can see these nature spirits, the adults around them remain oblivious to their presence. The girls accept Totoro and the rest of the forest spirits as they are, not questioning how such strange creatures can exist in their world.

On the surface, this seems like a whimsical, endearing story of two sisters moving to a new town, exploring the place, and making new friends. Underneath, lies



a darker story of loss and grief as they deal with their mother's sickness, which only seems to be getting worse as days pass.

At one point in the movie, Mei, the younger sister, runs away. After searching for her for hours, the villagers think that she might have gotten lost or may even have died in an accident somewhere. Desperate to find her sister, Satsuki asks Totoro for help, who takes her on a wild, magical ride across the village. They eventually find Mei, a little dirty from walking around but otherwise safe. The girls get to

see their mother in her hospital bed from afar, and all's well that ends well.

Short and straightforward, right? However, there's a much darker, underlying message in the film that most would probably not realise at first glance. Some have said that Totoro could be the spirit of death, the Grim Reaper, who came to assist Mei to the afterlife after she passed away from an accident while running away. When their parents cannot be there for them, Totoro offers them comfort and a magical, dream-like adventure to forget

their worries. Others have analysed it as the mother dying from sickness instead. The entire movie is just an illusion the sisters came up with to cope with their grief and loss. Both explanations are dark and gloomy, however, young watchers would never realise this from the film's heart-warming, happy ending.

In another much-loved Ghibli movie, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, the main character's journey to making a living as a young witch-in-training can be viewed as an allegory for modern creatives trying to make it on their own and the struggles they have to face in a capitalist society. Kiki losing herself in her job and the burnout and depression that results from it are relatable for us living in this contemporary society obsessed with hustle culture. It reminds viewers, both young and old, the importance of taking breaks and simply enjoying life as it comes.

Similarly, *Spirited Away*, a Ghibli movie about a young girl being forced to take a job at a bathhouse to survive and save her parents, has interlinked themes of the horrors of a capitalist society, the dangers of hustle culture, and the all-consuming nature of work. It also deals with the ordeal of growing up, and the many ways that people hold on to a particular stage in their life, refusing to move forward and let go of the comfort of what is familiar.

Studio Ghibli's animations constitute a significant achievement of contemporary popular culture and continue to break boundaries. The studio's use of magical fantasy and escapist narratives to cope with trauma is a very effective way for young viewers to learn about the realities of life without making it gory or horrifying.

Fans who might have enjoyed the movies for their whimsical storytelling as a child might appreciate them for their underlying messages as adults. The fine line between fantasy and reality gets translated into the studio's signature magic realism style, which has captured the hearts of fans all over the world.

Ghibli continues to show viewers that just because it is an animated movie does not mean that it cannot contain meaningful, relatable life lessons in it as well.

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