

Too much self-help doesn't work. Here's why.

NOUSHIN NURI

While browsing the shelves at a bookstore, I see *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* staring at me. Another look and I'm beckoned by *The Power of Now*. It's hard to resist the temptation to be all that these titles promise – creative, consistent, communicative.

However, how much reading do you need to be a changed version of yourself?

Spending 40 minutes watching three videos on how to stop procrastinating is a 21st century paradox most of us have been a part of. Even doomscrolling leaves us with one or two productivity hacks nowadays. But does knowing or learning about improving ourselves translate into actual improvement?

It turns out that the abundance of self-help content has led us to spend a lot more time learning about self-help than actually helping the "self" improve.

I first came across the connection between the amount of self-help content we consume and its effectiveness in one of the classics of the genre. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie advises us to read only one chapter of the book per day. He does so because knowing how to make friends takes as long as it takes to read the book. But making friends by implementing

what you learn takes time. Time is what we don't allow when we are in a race to read every book with an enticing future printed on its cover.

The threat of consuming without implementing is higher when the content is in bite-sized digital media. Watching one self-help video leads social media algorithms to suggest more. The thumbnail guaranteeing "a new you" is hard to ignore.

Soon, you've watched more videos in one day than what you can implement in one month. That

is how self-help crosses the border of education and becomes entertainment.

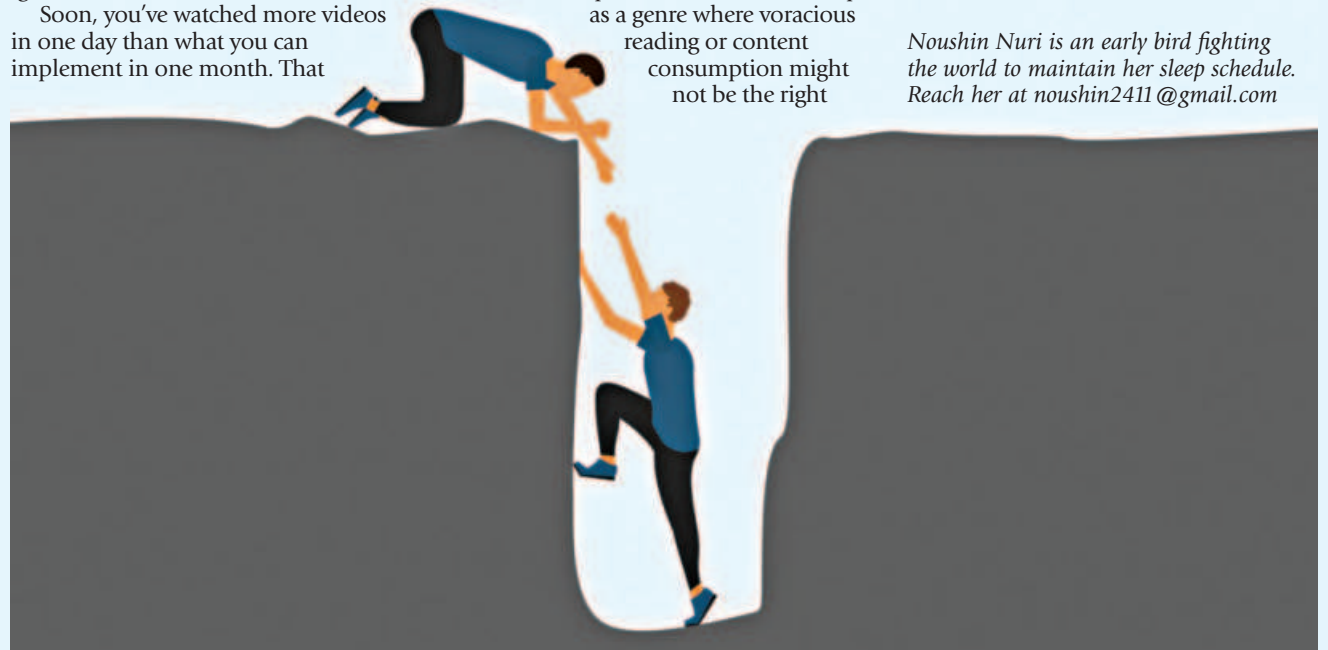
The problem with consuming self-help content as entertainment, on the other hand, is that it constantly tells us that we need to do better. However, because of the sheer volume of content we consume, it's easy to lose focus on what it is that we want to do better and end up not doing anything at all.

Perhaps we need to see self-help as a genre where voracious reading or content consumption might not be the right

answer. Consuming or reading needs to be coupled with action, and if necessary, needs to be rationed to make room for action.

While self-improvement in itself is noble and worthwhile, overdoing it can actually mar the purpose. There is no end to its pursuit. So, when you know that the finishing line will never be in sight, is there any point in going so fast?

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Why I'm okay with leaving joint families in the past

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

Joint families (read: chaos) have been irreplaceably woven into the yarns of Bangladeshi culture, intertwining familial lives across the subcontinent with threads of love and warmth.

Every form of Bengali media, from our rich literature to the feverish Zee Bangla serials, has solidified that a family is incomplete without grandparents, uncles, aunties, and cousins residing together. Yet, joint families are slowly vanishing in the urban parts of the country. Nevertheless, as someone living in a semi-joint family, I can say that joint families dying out may not entirely be a bad thing.

First and foremost, joint families tend to engage in altruistic behaviour. The family's head gets too much of a say in everyone's life. In many cases, individual decisions are superseded in favour of collective ones. Correspondingly, you feel restrained, become hesitant, and start questioning your own beliefs and opinions.

As clichéd as it sounds, Bangladeshi families represent more of *Game of Thrones* than *Modern Family*. There's always going to be bickering going on in some shape or form. Everyone has a different opinion, and in very few cases, are they willing to agree with an alternative point of view.

Simple matters on sharing the kitchen and dining table can escalate into full-blown arguments and fights. Turns out *Star Plus* and *The Kardashians* were warning us of this all along.

Then we have matters of privacy and personal space. In a joint family, privacy is arguably non-existent, as personal issues

find a way to become the whole family's business. Aunts, uncles, and screaming children will barge in, unannounced. People will appear out of thin air and stream Facebook videos or watch *Sultan Suleiman* on full volume the night before an exam. The constant inflow of relatives and random people can feel suffocating at times, no

matter how much you love your family.

A staple of deshi culture is to make comparisons. Unsurprisingly, joint families take it to a whole other level. Constant comparison on justifiable and trivial matters can turn your cousins into combatants instead of friends, resulting in a lot of unhealthy competition and resentment, which in many cases sours relationships and creates distance. Not to mention how stressful and damaging it can be to a teen's self-worth.

Don't get me wrong, growing up in a joint family isn't all bad. Living together with your family can teach you important life lessons. Furthermore, they are a great support system and will be there for you when things get bad. Additionally, the joy of holidays gets amplified in these households.

Nevertheless, opinions regarding joint families are subjective. I'm sure many people love living with their extended families in a supportive and safe space. On the flip side, the problems you face living with your family are genuine and shouldn't be discounted.

From my experience living in a joint family, I can say that it isn't for me, and I wouldn't mind leaving the concept in the past.

Turns out Taaseen Mohammed Islam can write semi-decently at the expense of being able to do basic math. Send him pointers at taaseen.2001@gmail.com



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