

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY JUNE 16, 2022, ASHAR 2, 1429 BS

A PUBLICATION OF *The Daily Star*



BEING THE
THERAPIST OF
YOUR FAMILY

PG 3

SOUND POLLUTION FROM
SCHOOLS IS A REAL
PROBLEM

PG 4



WHERE ARE OUR PUBLIC SPACES?



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

EDITORIAL

If I want to hang out with my friends or just go outside to spend some time on my own, I don't have a lot of options. In most cases, I would visit a coffee shop or a restaurant. Sometimes, I might even drop by a friend's place and spend a few hours with them on their rooftop.

However, the more I think about it, the more absurd it seems.

Does this city really lack public spaces to the point where our only option to spend some quality time outside is at a restaurant or a friend's rooftop?

Dhaka doesn't have too many parks or open public spaces. I, and many others, have only these limited options to choose from when we want to spend some outdoor time. Life would've been a lot different if only we had more choices. But given the current situation of the city, it seems that asking for such public spaces is a luxury, one that Dhaka can't afford.

– Faisal Bin Iqbal, Sub-Editor & Digital Coordinator, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

ANIME



Sonny Boy is the best of what anime has to offer

AYAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

In today's anime industry, commercialised shows crunched out solely for generating sales and making money are the norm. Thankfully, *Sonny Boy*, an anime original directed by the lauded director Shingo Natsume, is breaking said norm.

Sonny Boy tells the story of a class of 9th graders who suddenly go adrift in perpetual nothingness. Some of them start developing supernatural abilities and, in the absence of adults and authority figures, various conflicts over dominance and power start arising.

The show is unconventional, to say the least. It features an almost elegiac narrative that's rich in philosophical ponderings and values that feel more akin to short stories from famous western authors rather than anything close to its contemporaries. However, the main hooks, so to say, for this show are the subtly-included idiosyncratic storytelling and cultural touchstones.

The story of *Sonny Boy* is not told in a linear fashion. It's not an anthology either. Instead, every episode starts with a different piece of the same narrative, jumping forward in time with no regard or care for the loose ends from the preceding episodes.

This forth and beyond may create a disorienting feeling among viewers, but the show was intentionally made to do so. It is supposed to be obtuse in nature. The themes involved in the narrative are neither simple nor do they have clear answers, which is a big part of *Sonny Boy's* charm. The various open-ended conclusions scattered through its 12

episodes are masterfully crafted to be confusing yet fitting at the same time.

While this configuration rubbed off a lot of viewers in the wrong way, I feel that it stands out to be one of the strongest points of the series. This narrative choice of incomplete and unanswered storylines seems to be deftly implemented to provide the audience with what seems to be nothing more than a glimpse of certain moments and milestones in the characters' lives. This somewhat generates a feeling of enchantment as if the characters shown have lives of their own which continue far beyond the scope of the series.

On a production level, the show speaks for itself. Breath-taking visuals, art, and animation that are far more realistic and surreal than most modern anime make it an instant standout. An eccentric soundtrack of synthesizers, indie rock, and deadpan silence manages to complement the vivid landscapes and grandiose scheme of things in a way that is almost unheard of in shows from the last decade.

Sonny Boy cleverly utilises everything that anime, as a versatile creative medium, has to offer. It adopts a clear direction from the very beginning, and the amount of passion that went into this project is as clear as day. While the anime cannot be called a timeless classic yet, it will most definitely be remembered as a unique spectacle for years to come.

Remind Ayaan that he should be studying for his SSC examination at ayaan.shams@gmail.com



TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE

A	B
After Dark Mr. Kitty	Secret Love Song Little Mix
Missing You Today Public	Indian Rain Colonial Cousins
Out of My Mood gate 문	Where To Find Me New Rules
The Man Who Can't Be Moved The Script	Should I Stay or Should I Go The Clash

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



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

To be the master of (n)one

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

The term 'jack of all trades' was coined to describe Shakespeare, a playwright who was skilled at managing all aspects of theatre production from direction to set design to costumes. Then how did a phrase linked to one of the greatest writers of all time come to have so many negative connotations?

We tend to see the world through narrow lens, disregarding diversification. Thus, when we see someone having a knack for a particular skill, we tend to force them to go down that path to become better. It may look like specialising on one particular skill is a sure-shot way to having a head start, so, spending time on any other alternative is deemed undesirable.

This demand for hyper specialisation has made it difficult for any integration of the left and right side of our brains. By chasing competency in one field, we are forced into short-sightedness. As a result, we may think we are bad at other things when in reality, we were so focused on one thing that we didn't invest time in developing others.

In the world of sports, however, research shows that while engaging in strict practice causes athletes to reach their peak relatively early, the future looks bleak. Those who sample multiple sports in their early days and delay specialisation go on to become better than the athletes who specialised early. This is because diversification allows a child to develop a variety of motor skills that are transferable between sports, reduces the likelihood of burnout, and helps to become passionate.

The patterns ring true in the case of learning musical instruments as well as a multitude of other creative pursuits.

If you look closely enough, education is no different. In a culture where we are shunned if we have no idea about what we ought to study or do with our lives, we are made to believe that a focused path is likely to bring us success. While those with a career-focused education are likely to get hired quickly because of their expertise and become well paid in the short run i.e. the dream reserved for all Bangladeshi kids, they are also less likely to be adaptable to changing work conditions and the world at large. Flexibility is the biggest advantage to being the jack of all trades, which means we can fill many roles and make observations, specialists often cannot.

What we often fail to recognise is that early specialisation makes poor choices more likely, especially for impressionable teenagers. Here is where well-rounded, holistic education systems get it right. The case for liberal arts education is the belief that a jack of all trades is indeed better than a master of one.

The misguided notion that a 'master of none' is a bad thing has us chasing after specialisation when so many of us do not wish to be pigeonholed. Instead of picking one field and restricting ourselves to certain skillsets, exploring a variety of fields is the key to self-discovery. After all, the entire saying actually says, "a jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one."

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

BEING THE THERAPIST OF YOUR FAMILY

ANGELINA NODEE FRANCIS

Do you have to hear your family members rant about their problems while they continue to not acknowledge the existence of mental health or therapy? Do your siblings run to you whenever something comes up, and you have to reassure them that things will eventually get better?

I am here to tell you that you are not alone.

It feels nice to have someone to lean on during the worst of times and trust them enough to be able to tell them everything about our circumstances. I do it too, sometimes.

However, it is essential that we acknowledge the fact that this cannot be a permanent solution, and the healthy way to dealing with these issues would be to speak to a mental health professional.

Sometimes, our family members face a scenario that they may be unable to figure out a way to deal with it, and hence they end up coming to you for help.

As a kid, I never really understood why some of my older family members had sudden outbursts where they would yell at each other or passively aggressively express their anger without making any attempt to sort things out. During these situations, I would find myself sitting quietly in my room, pretending to study or work while entertaining the rants from either or both parties engaged in the argument.

When we bury our emotions for a really long period of time and are unable to communicate our feelings effectively, we end up having emotional outbursts or meltdowns using harsh words, which only lead to hurt feelings and resentments.

My younger sibling would come up to me sometimes, telling me how she was losing

hope in almost everything, and that her life seemed like a mess. I could only tell her that it would get better. To which she would understandably ask, when?

When an elderly relative cried on my shoulder after losing her husband, all I could do was hug her tight.

There is a story behind the tears that are shed for the deceased husband, a story behind unspoken words and anger, a story behind losing hope at an age where one hasn't even started living life properly.

However, what often goes unnoticed is the impact on the assumed family therapist. Remember that you are also a person whose emotions hold equal value, that there is only so much you can do. It is okay to feel overwhelmed when multiple people expect you to objectively listen to their problems and offer reasonable solutions. It is also okay to not always be available to absorb rants from your family members all the time.

Respectfully asking loved ones to give you space may allow you to establish healthy boundaries. Risking your own mental health while seemingly helping others out with their problems may not help anybody in the long run.

Angelina Nodee Francis enjoys cracking self-deprecating jokes and running away from her problems. Send her memes at angelinafrancis004@gmail.com



Sound pollution from schools is a real problem

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

Drowsy and disoriented, I look at the clock. It's 7:30 AM. Students at the nearby high school are singing into a microphone; their voices ringing at a thunderous volume from loud speakers. The tune is what Metallica's rendition of a wailing siren would sound like.

This is how my entire neighbourhood wakes up every morning. Their morning assembly is the least of our worries. The disconcerting issue is the school's outdoor rehearsal and celebrations, which subject helpless residents to deafening speaker music and static, sometimes for days on end.

Residential areas consist of family homes with residents of all ages – babies, teens and ageing grandparents. Personally, living close to a noisy school, studying at home becomes impossible for me. For residents suffering from migraine, anxiety, heart diseases, insomnia or any illness, unwarranted loud noises can have long-term, detrimental consequences on their health. My mother suffers from high blood pressure and loud sounds trigger her headaches and insomnia.

"During assemblies and cultural functions, it gets really noisy and it hampers studies and prayers," says Raiyan Abrar, a final-year student of

MIST. "The local masjid has requested authorities to not play loud music at least during prayer times but nothing has changed."

According to Bangladeshi law, the allowed noise level for residential areas is 55 decibels during the day.

Some institutions have combatted noise pollution by limiting their events to indoor arrange-

ments. Every institution should ideally allot a separate space in their infra-structural planning for an auditorium. Auditoriums muffle out loud music and commotion. Moreover, schools should be established in comparatively spacious areas with lots of trees to help buffer and filter out generated noise.

If you walk around a residential area, you'll find several schools have been set up at leased buildings that were initially constructed to

function as residential apartments. Such schools lack sufficient campus space and any event they arrange can lead to a huge crowd within a tiny radius. There's also this tendency of schools to be established in close proximities.

Where I live, there are four schools within a 2500-foot radius.

"There are several schools around my house. Our mornings commence sourly with horns from students' cars and school buses. In the afternoon and evening, when shift wise classes end, the noise only increases. Event days are worse. No matter which corner of the house I'm in, it's loud and often infuriating," says Zarin Tasnim, 20, a resident of Uttara.

Ironically, street signs read "No horns please. School ahead." to protect students from external noise and then schools go on to allow hullabaloo within their premises, without concern for residents. School staff need to be provided with a clear manual on preventing noise from permeating outside school grounds. There also needs to be strict monitoring of their adherence to standard noise regulations.

Nuzha forgives people for pronouncing her name wrong and wallows in books and anxiety. Suggest her fiction at nuzhaoishee1256504@gmail.com



The issues with performative activism

IRINA JAHAN

A case of injustice comes to light and we take to Instagram to share a post about it on our story or rant about it on Facebook in response. We draw attention to the pressing matter and pat ourselves on the back for sharing our opinions. Then, before we know it, there is a new social issue and we unknowingly drift into the current of performative activism again, without being aware that it is actually harming the very causes we are trying to for.

Performative activism is the term that is used to address the act of speaking up for a cause for the sake of garnering attention or presenting a positive public image, instead of doing so out of genuine care.

This isn't to say that every time someone is vocal about a certain issue, they are doing the wrong thing. It is completely within one's right to share their opinions about injustices taking place, but doing so without the intention of properly engaging in this cause for the long haul or without relevant knowledge is not okay.

The primary danger of performative activism is that it hinders activism's objective, which is to recognise the trauma of victims and bring about necessary changes through impactful actions. The culture of minimised efforts in activism has stunted the potential of bringing impact, reducing issues into trending hashtags or 24-hour stories that will only be glanced at for a few seconds.

For instance, a lot of people seemed appalled at the ruthless attacks the Hindu community recently faced in the country, but not many of them were willing to recognise the problematic behaviours and beliefs that are indoctrinated in people by society through stereotyping and other prejudices.

The internet's power to spread important information cannot be questioned. However, a lot of this information is not free from biases and so should never be the primary source of our knowledge. Furthermore, overly sensationalised news that is rampantly spread on social media can turn us away from getting information from reliable sources.

We must remember that such forms of bite-sized, washed-down news and infographics that are rarely cited are never sufficient or reliable when it comes to educating ourselves on important matters. Instead of jumping onto the bandwagon of temporary online based activism, people should incorporate actual work in reading, learning, and educating ourselves about relevant topics if we are to meaningfully advocate for a cause. In doing so, we can hope to be mindful of actions that may perpetuate more ignorance and propel the movement to create impact forward.

Turning real life social issues into an online trend or desensitising the mass to people's sufferings through such con-



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

tent can be frightening. Hence, our goal should be to commit to proper activism which requires people to improve on a personal level and educate those around them so that the results appear on a

broader and social level.

Irina wants everyone to petition for longer weekends. Show your support by reaching out at irinajahan17@gmail.com



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

Where are our public spaces?

NAHALY NAFISA KHAN & HRISHIK ROY

With a growing population and the ever-increasing pollution, Dhaka has evolved to be an extremely chaotic place to live. It has constantly been ranked as one of the top ten least liveable cities for the past few years – an "achievement" most of us would not be very proud of.

Amidst all of the negative aspects making the lives of the city-dwellers nothing less than the nine circles of Dante's *Inferno*, the lack of public spaces in the city also contributes to making the city unliveable. In various cities across the globe, outdoor recreational public spaces provide the citizens with the opportunity to engage in various activities for amusement. Such activities allow them to better cope with issues such as mental health, as the refreshing and soothing environment outdoors – a break from the fast-paced city life – allows them to gather themselves and function better.

But what qualifies as a public space? Or the lack thereof?

"Any place where people from all walks of life have open access is a public space in my opinion. In that sense, public transportation can also be called public space. So are roadside shops and restaurants, footpaths, playgrounds and parks," says Fahad Al Mahmood, a young professional and recent graduate from Dhaka University.

"However, public spaces, in the most conventional sense, are quite insufficient in the capital to say the very least. Those that qualify suffer from a gross lack of security for the common citizens," he adds.

Echoing Fahad, Radiah Tasnim Khan, a Vigarunnisa Noon School and College student, comments that the very few public spaces which exist in the status quo are particularly unsafe for women due to the harassment and moral policing they often have to face.

"When there are not enough safe public spaces, people eventually start going to restaurants. But, then again, the mental peace and mental development which happens in outdoor public spaces, such as parks, cannot possibly be emulated in small cafes and restaurants. I think everyone deserves to live in a city where they can breathe," Radiah says.

A lack of safe public spaces in Dhaka has aggravated a lot of issues, especially among the youth. From inadequate socialising opportunities to the development of detrimental habits such as consuming unhealthy foods at restaurants, and to even exacerbating class differences to the point of social alienation – the inadequacy of public spaces has taken a cancerous form at this point.

"When we go to a restaurant, we do not go from one table to another just to get to know strangers. But, when you go to a public space such as a lake or a park, you meet lots of new people and you get the opportunity to talk and interact with them. Therefore, public spaces are great socialising spots, especially because there are no distractions in terms of interacting with people – something which you would face if you went to somewhere like a restaurant or shopping mall," explains Maliha Rahman, A Level student at Maple Leaf International School.

When asked about what he and his friends choose for recreation, Tajrian Khan, a grade 12 student of Mangrove School shares, "What we can afford to eat is usually junk food, just for the sake of having a place to sit for an hour. A park and a few benches in your neighbourhood are the least you can expect from a nation's capital."

However, being able to go to restaurants or cafes or amusement parks is something which can only be afforded by people from a higher socio-economic background. This often leaves out the ones at the bottom of the social order due to the unavailability or inaccessibility of public spaces.

South Breeze School student Mahir Mohammad Tazwar illustrates, "The typical hangout spots in our country are restaurants, and everyone is not financially capable of affording a meal whenever someone asks for it. As it is not always possible for people to meet in restaurants, if there were more public spaces, you could stay in touch with people better."

This crisis has put the city planners and authorities into quite a fix as well. Opening up more public spaces is an issue that is becoming increasingly hard for them as well, due to the capital being one of the most densely populated in the world.

"We currently have 12 playgrounds and 26 parks under our jurisdiction in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), of which, some are still under construction. We have tried our best to meet international standards while constructing them, with the right amount of greeneries accompanying these spaces," says Mo-

hammad Sirajul Islam, DSCC chief urban planner.

According to DSCC's master plan spanning till 2050, the city corporation will be identifying a space for a playground in every ward. This is a great challenge due to the city's dense population.

"Statistically speaking, 2000 people move to Dhaka every day due to climate-related displacement and other issues. Old Dhaka is one of the major crisis points when it comes to implementing the plan due to its shortage of open spaces," Sirajul Islam elaborates.

"If we come across any such piece of land that can accommodate the purpose but is not under our jurisdiction, we are ready to apply to the government to be able to include that in our plans following necessary legal procedures. RAJUK has made detailed area plans of the capital, following which they make recommendations for opening up such spaces. Proper implementation of these recommendations can prove effective in solving this crisis as well," he suggests.

The law to conserve playgrounds, open spaces, parks and water bodies suggests that no one can change the characteristics of any such space. Proper implementation of this existing law and coordination among all stakeholders can improve the situation in near future, hopes the DSCC chief planner.

Nahaly Nafisa Khan is a sub-editor at the Metro desk of The Daily Star.

Hrishik Roy is a contributor at the SHOUT of The Daily Star. Reach out to him at hrddibbo@gmail.com



ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

Claustrophobia, and the lack of open spaces in Dhaka

I
The opening scene of Federico Fellini's 1963 classic, *8½*, is one of the most influential opening scenes in the history of cinema.

Marcello Mastroianni drives into a traffic jam. As he stops, a man looks back at him from the front car. He's not amused. The camera pans slowly. A man in the back seat of a car looks at Marcello. The camera pans; the driver is a lady. She's sleeping. Why not? Who knows when this will end? Marcello wipes the windscreen of his car. The camera pans out. People are helpless and hopeless in the jam. The worst part: the people have accepted the lack of space and movement as a part of their life.

While Marcello wiped his windscreen, his car began to fill up with smoke. He finds it difficult to breathe. Claustrophobia. The people in the cars fail to notice Marcello. He fights to get out of the car. Just when he seems to have lost the battle, Marcello is free.

II
From birth to adult life, I've moved from one "open-ended" campus to another. When I was born, my father was a young professor at Chittagong College. Soon after, we found ourselves in the green and open campus of Jahangirnagar University. When I was four, my father went



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

to study at a university town in Wales. Aberystwyth. The Cardigan Bay was to its west, giving some of the prettiest sunsets in the UK. I never felt suffocated.

We returned to Bangladesh, to Jahangirnagar University. I spent my middle and high school, college and university here. The campus then was much more open than it is now. Again, I never felt

suffocated.

I joined Jahangirnagar as a young lecturer. Soon, I was off to another campus in the UK. It was Cambridge, in England. That was the last open-ended campus I enjoyed. Upon return to Bangladesh, I have been teaching at Jahangirnagar, but have been living in Dhaka in my ancestral stead.

Ever since I started living in Dhaka, I feel suffocated. This city is not the "open-ended" environment I took for granted for more than three decades of my life. Whatever the time of the day, my residential area is always busy. You can't walk on the street. It's always noisy. It's easy to blame the authorities, but more difficult to ask, how can I solve this problem?

There are pockets of open spaces around my residential area. I can access them. The thought of walking or cycling to those pockets in a city that's not open-ended and spilling with noise of high decibels, high pollution, and un-walkable footpaths puts me off.

When at home, I prefer to stay in the comfort of my study. Thinking of my childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of taking open spaces for granted, makes me feel claustrophobic. I'm in Dhaka not out of choice, but out of circumstance. I want to escape the closed suffocating space like Marcello in *8½*. The thought of an escape from Dhaka is a bad dream that brings me back to reality.

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

satire.

What if Facebook commenters became your therapist?

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Sadman: Hello, everyone. I'd say "Good morning" but I had to take a two-hour bus ride for compulsory attendance for a degree I didn't choose. Clearly, there's nothing good about my mornings and that's exactly why you're here.

Sigma Fraud (SF): Was this meeting really necessary? Couldn't this crippling depression crisis be mitigated through a poorly-worded Facebook post and some light-hearted generic comments?

Sadman: Unfortunately, that didn't work. I tried opening separate Facebook accounts for each of the voices in my head so that they can have their own social space to dump their misery and let doom scrolling take care of the rest. However, the voices won't stop. My anxiety and panic attacks are taking over.

With the help of internet, I've been diagnosed with something between crippling depression and a terminal illness. I finally took my mom's advice and decided to talk to people about my mental health. You've

always been supportive of my internet paragraphs and so I reached out to you.

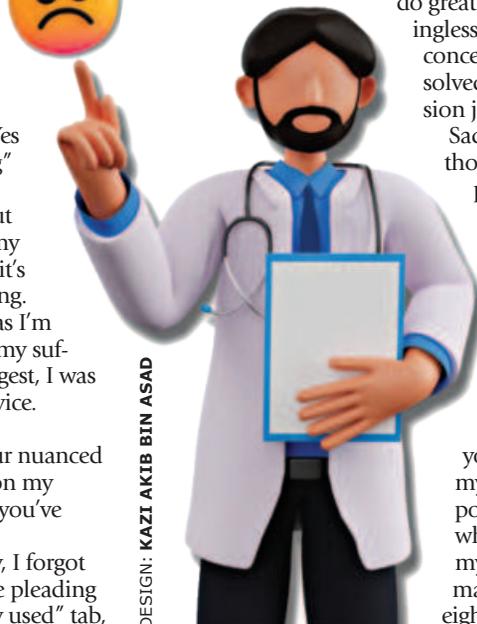
SF: Well, this is clearly a case of acute Attention Seeking Syndrome. I'm prescribing a daily dose of "Yes King" with "Stay strong, King" twice a day. On bad days, try taking "yes" with extra "s". But I should warn you – one of my patients overdosed and now it's his only response to everything.

Sadman: Fraud, as much as I'm happy that you can relate to my suffering as your comments suggest, I was looking for more realistic advice.

SF: It is what it is, King.

Sadman: Oh, you and your nuanced ways of telling me to choke on my problems! Faria, I'm hoping you've some useful advice for me.

Angel Faria (AF): I'm sorry, I forgot my emojis at home. I had the pleading face emoji on my "frequently used" tab,



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

ready for your posts. I was going to top it off with an "Aww, you'll do great!" My meaningless templated concern would've solved your depression just like that! Sadman: I—I thought those pleading faces were exclusive to me! You were always the first one to react and comment on my post. When you reacted to my 1300-word post of me whining about my engineering major, within eight seconds, you

didn't even bother reading it did you? Did you even care when my dog died?

AF: You had a dog? Sorry, what I meant to say was, "Aww, dw! Just chill, fr."

Sadman: At least I have a mental health group therapist among us. Dr Bishal, help me out, please.

Dr Bishal (DB): Of course, Sadman. What else's bothering you?

Sadman: My family's severe financial crisis is only worsening my depression. Dad's been bedridden after his accident last month and so I have to work two jobs. My childhood trauma's coming back in my nightmares so I'm afraid to sleep. It all started when—

DB: Stop. You had me at "depression". I advise you to start looking into your faith.

Sadman: But doctor, hear me out. I do pray regularly but this trauma—

DB: Unfortunately, the session's over. That'll be 10 thousand bucks. You're welcome.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

The Second Species

ANUSYNTHIA JAHAN CHOWDHURY HERA

This story is the winning entry from the Science-Fiction Story Writing Competition, part of the 65th Annual Science Festival, organised by Scintilla Science Club of Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School, Dhaka. SHOUT was a media partner at this event.

.....

Raeh grasped those slipping words through Hyraan's eyes as they took their time to blink. It hasn't been that long since people invented yet another way to communicate – the Netrospeech; a fusion of blinking and Morse code.

A hundred years ago humans welcomed a new species of their kind, *Homo debilis-sagax*. Since then, human civilization has come past the idea of "development", and was moving forth with the hankering for the last offering nature has in store for them.

While balancing Hyraan's "cranial adjuster", Raeh made sure his ending seconds were comfortable enough. No, she wasn't one of the second species like Hyraan, she belonged to the species that lagged behind the race of evolution.

It was the year 4000. Neurologist Kri-gia officially declared the existence of a new human species. Needless to say, the response was everything but welcoming. Science had advanced a lot back then, but the ability to incorporate rationality and creativity among the consciousness of the general public was a far cry from the advances that were made.

The second species was an unexpected gift of mother nature; they were her result of countless failed creations which were deemed as untoward mutations. About 2000 years ago, before the species was recognised, humans received the first trace of such a mutation. They called it "progeria"; an extremely rare, progressive genetic disorder that caused children to age rapidly.

No matter how rare and unexpected something is, it's needless to say that wealth and creativity never go in vain. The indignant nature stormed off in an endeavour to "gift" the humans their desired capability to conquer the world.

Beep. Beep. The sounds interrupted Raeh's thoughts. Hyraan will die within 1 hour. It was time for her to send his body to the lab.

Homo debilis-sagax, the intellectually keen yet physically weak humans, took control all over the world within just 50 years of their official recognition. The humongous skull and baseball shaped eyes – their morphology spoke loudly about their acumen. The only thing that made them dependent on the *Homo sapiens* was, and still is, their comparatively weak physique.

"Raeh," the robotic voice of Hyraan's father brought Raeh back again from

her thoughts. "Hello, sir. I have sent Hyraan's body to the laboratory 30 minutes ago."

"Good. Your payment has been sent to your account. Your presence is expected when needed. You can take your leave."

Raeh is a 70-years-old "debilis caretaker". She has taken care of 3 children of the second species till now. No matter how many times she has witnessed it, the rapid mental growth and intellectual depths of those children always left her awestruck.



She still remembers Hyraan's first words – "Rest your facial muscles. The pity you're trying so hard to hide is slipping out."

She had goose-bumps all over her body. The keenness of that 5-years-old boy caught her off guard. After that, 15 years have passed in a sessile journey with Hyraan; she was taken to a height which seemed like the end of her universe while feeling dematerialised simultaneously. It appeared to her that the boy could hold the entire world's thoughts and everything that was beyond.

Philosophy has always been her favourite. While taking an involuntary-part

in the "race" of her species against the second one, Raeh chose to devote her life in this field of study. But poverty shackled her down and she was left behind under the mercy of her opponents.

Knowledge is power. This became truer than ever when the short-lived *Homo debilis-sagax* out powered them.

After returning home, Raeh was going through her journals, and came across her records on the day she learned how to control a "cranial adjuster". That device helps the second species to rest their gigantic heads which the body can't car-

physical intercourse, and thus they reproduce through surrogacy using Raeh's kinds.

It was time for an evening walk. No matter how fascinated she was by the children she has taken care of, Raeh never built a strong connection with anyone other than Hyraan. Her worn out soul is stronger than many, but this death made her feel older than ever. Fatigue besieged her all around, and the destructive mechanism of the world weighed down her frail courage. The placid indifference of the world became suddenly unbearable and asphyxiated her.

Why are they fighting against their second kinds? More accurately, why is the world made to do so? It was their virulent ambitions which brought them down to this place. The affluent societies all over the world once came together in the call of the scientists who lost their moral compasses. Didn't they conduct experiments to "produce" more intelligent manpower? Didn't they decide to breed the species only among the wealthy ones? This "inbreeding" led to the halt in the second kinds' physical development and the expansion of penury. Why did they ignore the plausibility of turning into Victor Frankenstein?

"Rebels. They are rebels, Raeh. Humans have evolved to rebel against the inevitable – the system of loss and destruction. Even the universe of absurdness can't defeat the waves of the humans' creativities, their rebellions. The thought of eradicating the rebels is a rebellion itself. We all are inherently rebels, Raeh. No matter how much troublesome others' creativity brings me, I can't really hate them. After all, we are all on the same boat. I think, instead of saying that the world is built on the mechanism of 'destruction', it should be called 'rebellion'. That's more poetic, is it not?"

Hyraan's words submerged in his tired laughter empties out Raeh's head. She can think of nothing but Hyraan.

Suddenly, the rebellion of her cells against her physical entity's downfall becomes clearer to her. But her mind, filled with the words of her kinds' rebellion, is calm. Liberation overtakes the chaos of biological fights and finally, she feels her pleasant departure to the oblivion far from the reach of the species which are to come after her.

The Morse code at the beginning of the story reads "There is a life and there is a death, and there are beauty and melancholy between." It is a quote by the French philosopher Albert Camus.

The writer is a student of class 11 at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College.

The unnecessary glorification of the tortured artist

NAMREEN SHAIYAZ

For artists, their art is a conduit for them to express their emotions. Many artists tap into their baser, more honest side to produce their work.

However, most people seem to believe that art which comes from darkness is the only valid kind, and gives it more precedence over art that is birthed from more positive emotions, thinking such work to be shallow. To explain this phenomenon, it is important to think of why people actually consume art.

For many, consuming art can feel comforting. Not everyone is gifted with the ability to articulate their feelings in the way they want to, so they turn to artists to feel seen and understood.

However, this connection does not happen with happier art. Many people see light-hearted creations or uplifting work as not having any profound takeaways or being anything notable. This is why tragic and so-called "artistic" works are the ones that are usually critically acclaimed, and are recognised more as reflected in reviews and award shows.

The problem that comes from this is that it pushes the idea that artists must



suffer for their creations to be good. Many young artists feel the pressure to only create art about their darker side, and neglect the part of them that might want to produce something that isn't very intense. Making art on a heavy topic usually requires one to go into a miserable state of mind and this puts a strain on one's mental health.

For a lot of people, creating art about their trauma can help them alleviate their pain and help cope with it. The painter John William Godward was known for his paintings of beautiful women drenched in opulence, which contrasts sharply with the unhappy and traumatic life he lived. On the other hand, artists like Caravaggio are lauded for their violently grotesque

works which are supposed to reflect psychological realism. Both these artists were tortured souls, but one is remembered for the aesthetic value of his art, and the other for the meaning behind his.

It might also just be a matter of choice, or a change in mindset. K-pop group BTS made their start by writing music which was more angsty and rebellious. Not surprising, considering that they debuted as teenagers. As they have grown older, their music has become less painful and aggressive, and is now more about self-love and learning to accept themselves. Just because they are no longer singing about being sad does not mean they have downgraded.

At the end of the day, art is simply a representation of what an artist chooses to share with the world. One who spreads joy is not lesser than the one sharing their hardships. Both are valid in their own rights, and should be given the same level of appreciation.

Namreen has been stuck in the void for too long. Send help at namreen.shaiyaz@gmail.com

OPINION

I can't keep up with the MCU. Here's why.

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is probably the biggest pop culture franchise in the world. Despite it not stopping to churn out movies anytime soon, it is safe to say that the MCU has already run its course.

With *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), they wrapped up the storyline they have been building since its start, and key players in the universe such as *Iron Man* and *Captain America* completed their respective character arcs. It is evident that continuing the franchise now after its climax is only bringing up its inherent flaws.

The biggest strength of the MCU is perhaps also its biggest problem, and that is the shared universe its movies occupy. Essentially, you already have to be a pre-existing fan invested in the world. A new viewer interested in watching *Doctor Strange 2* would have to not only watch the first *Doctor Strange* film, but also *WandaVision* and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* to understand what's happening. In the initial phases, this was easier to follow, but at this point the MCU has progressed so far, that new viewers will miss out on the appeal of interconnectivity.

The newer movies and Disney+ shows seem more focused on fan service and advertising the next MCU project. Shows like *WandaVision* and *Loki* focused more on setting up the next big crossovers, with the latter being riddled with plot holes which most fans overlooked. If you're looking for a standalone movie to enjoy for the merit of the singular storyline, it cannot be found in an individual MCU project in recent memory.

Another inherent problem with the shared universe strategy is that these projects need to conform to the same tone or format. The first act of *Shang-Chi* seemed

like a breath of fresh air and the start to a great martial arts film. By the third act, they just went with a full epic CGI battle like every other Marvel movie. Some of these projects could've benefited from having completely different tones.

The MCU has always been more of a Cliffnotes version of the source material. For instance, the *Hawkeye* series took elements of an acclaimed comics run and essentially presented a rather bland and toned-down version of that storyline. Granted, accuracy does not matter when it comes to making a great adaptation, but often with MCU, you are getting a lesser version of the same thing.

I am not trying to echo Martin Scorsese here, nor am I hating on something just because it is popular. The famous Hydra catchphrase "Cut off one head and two more shall take its place" has become applicable for the MCU now. There are so many branching projects that at one point it will become one too many to follow.

For superhero films and shows to be better, there needs to be a stronger focus on standalone stories rather than world building. It is high time that Marvel ended the franchise or let it evolve into something else.

Sabil spends most of his time making memes and trying to stay as hopeful as possible. You can contact him at sabilsadat616@gmail.com

