

From the Shores of the Lethe

Keeping aside all the big political and civil issues, is there really no need for supervision, and are we really happy munching on “kancha badam” mindlessly? It is not about restricting someone from doing something. It is more about allowing the better ones express themselves in a more dignified and meaningful way and helping them have a platform that is equally rewarding.

HISHAM M. NAZER

Fame, at least in the wake of industrial revolution and immediately after, had as much to do with “production” and “distribution” as with “talent.” But the scenario now has changed, with YouTube, Open Telecom Platform (OTP), Netflix (how it annihilated Blockbuster LLC!), TikTok, Instagram (FakeINSTAin is an interesting word) and stuffs. Everyday something or other breaks the record, to be broken tomorrow by something else.

The means of production and distribution have become cheap, easily available and therefore they have changed to such an extent that anyone can easily thrive without a physical space and build an empire, almost magically, out of “ether.” No one is saying that is a bad thing, but is that all there is, the rather dull, plainly out-there binary of good and bad?

Think for a moment how many things just a smartphone has replaced. With the fall of the value of the means of representation, value-wise the number of representations has fallen too as much as quantitatively it has increased. Of course, in our right mind we can never talk against the freedom of expression and the availability of platforms. People have the rights to have a space to express.

But no matter how many of us agree that the expressions should be “worthwhile” and with a potent platform, anyone with just anything can be potentially problematic if not outright dangerous, no matter how much we want to, but we cannot speak against the randomized “freedom of expression” that we often half-intelligently associate with “right to expression”. I guess this expresses my view more eloquently, reportedly said by Voltaire- “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

I am almost tempted to “express” that the modern ways of “supervision” that borders on digital eavesdropping and even monitoring, has made



supervision an Orwellian word. Had we just used that means for all the good purposes and not just for punishment often for crimes not committed, there were a chance that we could at least strike a casual conversation on meaningful supervision that is not superimposed, that is intelligent, inclusive, and besides restricting (by a transparent org that is run by the highest intellects of a country and aided by government) is rewarding as well. But any talk on supervision now will instantly lead one to utter the word-fascism. In the fear of getting that title and for the lack of an intelligent and a trustworthy way, is it sensible that we should never think of “quality check” that maybe could also lead us to providing the necessary where it is truly needed?

Keeping aside all the big political and civil issues, is there really no need for supervision, and are we really happy munching on “kancha badam” mindlessly? It is not about restricting someone from doing something. It is more about allowing the better ones express themselves in a more dignified and meaningful way and helping them have a platform that is equally rewarding. The online platforms pay a lot. What do we do, the saviors of art, culture and humanity? Where artists go unpaid/unrecognized just because “art” is not one of the “professional” requirements, I am afraid there is not much hope.

People finding a platform on their own to express themselves is partially made possible by our disinterest in providing one. With the fast-modernizing world we still have an

old soul that is ever ready to criticize change for good and that has created the imbalance in the equilibrium. It is largely our attitude towards others that has created the situation—the attitude that can seldom see beyond the self and help others achieve what they deserve.

The attitude also forces us within ourselves and discourages us from exploring the jurisdiction of our creativity that is not limited to “job descriptions.” Doing for others could have been a natural course of action, but instead we have a trophy of a term for this, and that is philanthropy. It is a big word for big people and therefore we are happy being small, self-obsessed “job holders” who curry favors with names who just hold “positions.”

With the whole situation coming

to an extreme point on the internet, we are seriously in no position or power to purify the “Lethe” that makes us forget stories requiring serious attention. The modern Lethe does more than just make us forget. Its hypnotic power even forces us remember what we do not and need not know. Being consumed in the process of consuming commodities, at the end of the day we feel “okay.” That is the power of the daily dose of internet. The fictions there simulate a reality that we feel is ours. We fail to differentiate, categorize, or even recognize the differences in qualities, and then it is all reels, an entertainment-feed that we cannot stop scrolling.

It will be increasingly difficult to single out anyone from the worldwide wave that has become an ever-changing and evolving platform for almost infinite number of “artists/doers” who are striving to go viral. Fame, just like everything else, has started to be evaluated based on number and not quality. No one will be famous anymore per se. I am afraid there will be no more Shakespeare, Rabindranath, Dante, Cervantes, or even our beloved Rowling because every day every single one of them is born, only to die and be forgotten the next day.

There is so many of them, and we are offered so much, and we have consumed so much that our tongue has lost all its tastes and our brain can no longer differentiate art from artifice. With a plethora of eye-pleasing, nerve-wracking, eardrum-blasting contents, it is only natural that our numbed senses will be content with whatever “masala” they can come by. Also, it is only apt for a generation who suffered (and perhaps ushered) Covid that being “viral” will mean more to them than being “meaningful.”

Hisham M Nazer is Assistant Professor, Department of English, Varendra University.

The Swaying Dreams

ABDULLAH RAYHAN

Drowned paddy fields look beautiful throughout the day. In the morning, when there is a rough wind, the flooded rice plants dance in the reflection of drenched sunlight. At noon, the wind is still. The rice plants then take rest in the comfortable warmth of the flood. During moonlit nights, the rice plants softly sway, as if they are in prayer. The distant chanting of frogs corresponds to the movement of the plants under the water. It all seems like the whole of the paddy field has joined together in a prayer to their goddess, the moon. And the moon, if she is pleased, bestows a boon of sweet wind to the earth, spreading a ripple of joy within the trees.

Swaying in a boat over these fields gives the feeling of swimming in dreams. Well, they were once the dreams of Yusuf. Ah, Yusuf's paddy field! The scars of burning days and troubling storms throbbed in the soil of this land. So many days and months were spent nurturing and embedding life in a field. Each grain of rice is like his child. Now all are gone under a curse of nature.

Yusuf was at home just a while ago, listening to the growling call of his stomach. His mother, wife, and his little daughter, Amina are asleep. Amina cried a lot before falling asleep because she was hungry. Boiled spinach wasn't enough to fill her young appetite. Yusuf held back his tears when the sound of her sobbing throbbed through his ears and settled inside his tired heart. Even now, while he stands on the edge of his boat, over the field of his drowned dreams, the memory

of his daughter's tears threatens to drown his consciousness.

The moon shines above Yusuf, spreading the ancient knowledge in its vintage hue of gray. Yusuf's rough feet stand on the edge of the boat. The curves of numerous cuts are hidden in his own shadow. Beside his feet, a huge rock lies with a rope tied to it. The weight of the rock tilts the boat slightly on its side. But it does not bother Yusuf.

Before leaving the house, Yusuf lit up the lamp to see his daughter's face one

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last time. In the light of the lamp, trails of dry tears glistened on her light-brown skin. Yusuf stared at his wife. She looked skinny with rough hair and dried limbs. And in the other room, Yusuf's mother was coughing. Yusuf didn't dare enter his mother's room because he was afraid that his mother would instantly know what was going on inside her son's head.

This is why, without telling anyone, Yusuf dragged his boat to the river and brought it over his own paddy field.

He had pulled the boat through a narrow muddy path with the little strength he had left in his muscles. Thorns penetrated the rough skin of his feet, but they didn't cause much pain. A tremendous sorrow protected his heart from such insignificant pain.

Yusuf pushed the boat onto the river and slowly hopped on. As Yusuf rowed the boat, it swayed, tearing the peaceful fabric of calm water, destroying the perfect reflection of the comforting moon.

Yusuf rowed the boat slowly with his thin, weak hands, turning toward the north every now and then. After a while, he crossed entered the territory of his swaying dreams.

And now, he stands over the drowned paddy field, watching his aspirations and hopes oscillate within the throat of a hungry river.

Yusuf slowly bends down and picks up the rock in his hand. One end of a rope is tied to the rock, and the other end embraces Yusuf's neck. As he lifts the rock, the boat tilts more. His hands tremble, not out of fear but of physical weakness.

A splashing sound. The frogs become silent as the ripples of Yusuf's fall sends a small current of eulogy to the nearby ears.

A few bubbles rise to the surface of the water to mingle with the echo of muffled thunder. Yusuf's silhouette trembles vaguely on the water until a sudden breeze shatters the shadow into tiny ripples. His dreams take flight and mingle with many other such unfulfilled dreams.

Abdullah Rayhan is a student of English Literature at Jahangirnagar University.



Odds and Ends from a Poem on Odds and Ends

WAZIHA AZIZ

A pity, it began as a reflective study. A bird's eye view of Kafka's conundrum Is a fallen leaf lost, or free?

I slid a window wide open
Found a dead moth crumpled on the sill.
A lost (free) king's battlefield burial, adorned in metal from worn swords, dim and jewels off their hilts.

I pondered as a practiced witness.
Was I the one to strike the killing blow?
As the window rolled over it's breaking bones
Was I bound?
Or found?

Tossed a lonesome coin into the wishing well,
Praying it would skip like stones.
I was nothing, I am nothing
but a witness.

An odd.
An end.
Lost.
Found.
In this whirlpool of odds and ends in their quest to untie their odd-end knots.

A ghost, but
I was not the only coat of dust
Settling on walls, floors, bars and handles
Hinges of doors, I was not the only architectural irrelevance.
Empty cabinets, abrupt bends, scarce flower beds against the yard wall.

An onlooker drowning in a sea of moth killers.
A moth-killer drowning in a sea of onlookers.

An Odd.
An End.
Alone.

Waziha Aziz is a grade 11 student from Chattogram, Bangladesh. She is an amateur writer, published on platforms such as SHOUT magazine. She is also currently a columnist for the Ice Lolly Review. You can find more of her work via Instagram @useless_depressing_poetry.

