



**ECHOES BY**  
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

# Religious Festivals and Holiday Blues

**I**  
 Students have a universal tendency to try to shift exam dates. That batch was no different. I stood my ground that day. The mid-term will be held during the designated week. I won the battle.

A girl approached me at the end of class. She politely asked me to shift the mid-term. My instincts told me not to give in, but there was a pleading gesture in her eyes that made me change my mind. I politely reciprocated. I asked her, "Can you give me one good reason that can convince me?"

"Sir, in the last four years, I've never been able to go to my village and properly celebrate Durga Puja with my grandparents."

I stopped her. I felt bad. "Young lady, your wish is granted."

The class never knew the reason why the mid-term was re-scheduled. Only she and I did.

**II**  
 Tri-semester in private universities are good at addressing session jams. They start and finish on time. This gives them an edge over public universities that lost the plot ages ago. However, where there's a beauty, there's always a beast.

Tri-semester sandwich everything into twelve to thirteen weeks. There are no proper holidays. There's no breathing space.

When saving time is of the essence,



Flowers being offered to the river on the day of Ful Biju.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

only official government holidays can be observed. Sadly, the obsession to save time can come at the cost of not accommodating proper holidays during major religious festivals.

**III**  
 Whatever their faith or ethnic background,

Bangladeshis love visiting family during religious festivals to recharge and energise themselves. Grandparents look forward to meeting their grandchildren. Siblings and cousins unite and update their bond. Communities get together. Any excuse to party gets a nod.

Sadly, for reasons mentioned above, not

all religious festivals are accommodated with breathing space. This is unfortunate for students, teachers, and the staff of a university. It may not be possible for the state to designate proper holidays during major religious festivals. However, it is possible for education institutes to accommodate through optional holidays. One of the beauties of public universities is that they recognise major religious festivals. They try their best to accommodate. One argument can be that they operate under bi-semesters, or annual exams that allow more breathing space. They may not always succeed, but they do recognise the need. Sadly, private universities in Bangladesh lag in granting proper holidays during Eid, Durga Puja, Buddha Purnima, Christmas, and Biju.

The time has come to rethink how to address religious festivals under tri-semesters. It's understandable that time is of the essence under tri-semesters. It's also true that education institutes have a moral obligation towards addressing these silent wishes of students from diverse backgrounds. What the solution will be is anybody's guess. That the issue needs to be addressed is a good way to start.

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

## An Ode to Private Tutors

**RAYA MEHNAZ**

When we think of private tutors, what pops up in the mind is an image of the ever-grinning pervasive older "bhaiya" from the memes. The more common reality of the well-meaning young-adult, however, often goes missing.

When asked, Huzayfa Rahman Hamza, a student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), talked about the intricacies of tutoring a young person, "I often ponder what my role is in this job. Do I just direct my students, teach them some mathematical formulas or explain some scientific terms, and go home? Or is it my responsibility to also guide them and nurture them?"

Hamza points out the dilemma of tutoring as a young person. The shared experience of life stages, as well as trying to guide a younger person responsibly, inherently makes the job very delicate and complex.

For Ahasan Habib, another student from BUP, the responsibility of teaching a young person is multifaceted. It is never just about just teaching, it's also about providing a safe space to a young person – a space that they might not get from other people in their life.

Ahasan also points out another facet about tutoring – the financial freedom it brings, and the personal sacrifices it invites.

"I am always working on the weekends,



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

it takes away a lot of my time to relax," says Ahasan.

The choice of multiple tuitions is the norm for most tutors. Most often, the burden of personal finances is not resolved by just one tuition. Such is the case with Shihab Shahriar Khan, a student of Patuakhali Medical College.

He reflects, "As a medical student, the scope of what I can do outside my intensive studies is very limited. So most often, tutoring is the only way I can get some income."

Most university-going private tutors like

Shihab depend on tuition to bear their personal and in many cases, educational costs. They end up taking on excessive workloads without paying attention to whether it is even doable. Many students face a lack of appreciation at the job as parents have unnatural expectations from student tutors.

However, according to Dhaka University student A. M. Aahad, the opposite can be true as well. He says, "I cannot say I felt the lack of appreciation for my job. The parents always liked me and considered me as another guardian for their children. They

discuss important aspects of their future with me and I try to suggest the optimum decisions."

On the other hand, Aahad also views the opportunities to get good tuition jobs is skewed in favour of public university students. He muses, "I think parents have this idea that public university students are more talented somehow. If I had been a private university student, I wouldn't have gotten these tuitions, definitely not on my desired pay scale."

Hamza reiterates this point, "Since I'm a BUP student, many people don't really know the university and that affects their perception of me and my subsequent salary."

Hamza and many other young tutors have gone through these same ordeals. Their skills have long been undervalued, their dedication overlooked. Yet, that doesn't take away the fact that many of these young tutors are also just trying their best at a job that is inherently cannot be transactional. They are simultaneously playing the role of a teacher, a mentor, a friend – all while trying to go through their own life struggles. They are providing a noble service, one that deserves a lot more appreciation.

*Find Raya at mehnazraya008@gmail.com*