



ECHOES BY
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Open Space: A final frontier?

I
I spent my formative years in Jahangirnagar and Cambridge University where I took space for granted. In both these university towns, there were pockets where I could escape and watch life pass by. Or I could just gaze up to the heavens asking: is there anything out there? Or I could hum the lyrics of songs or compose couplets of poems.

There were green fields and water bodies. There were trees where birds would sing, or squirrels run up during the day. At night, owls would look with wise eyes. I could tell the change of seasons simply by smelling the air. Be it rain, sun, clouds, or snow, I was always close to nature. Open space shaped my inner soul. Sadly, our happiness never lasts forever.

In August 1998, my father completed his tenure as the Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University. That month we moved back to our homestead in Dhaka at New Elephant Road. I was abroad at the time, but I didn't entertain the thought of settling in Dhaka. To this very day, I still don't.

II
Dhaka officially became a mega-city in



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

2000, passing a population of 10 million (1 crore). Today, Dhaka is the second most populous city in South Asia, behind only Delhi. This population has no logical reason to reduce in the foreseeable future. There will be tremendous competition for space. History suggests, policy makers will focus on housing and transport infrastruc-

tures. Sadly, they will probably not focus on open space. Less open space will be available as fields or parks. Waterbodies will be filled to meet housing or transport demand. Gardens and roadside trees will turn to grey concrete or black pitch.

Open space is a neglected dimension of exterior and interior architecture in Dha-

ka. This was never the case with Dhaka. If you look at Mughal architecture, you will see and feel the concept of (open) space within and outside buildings. The Mughals constructed their cities and buildings based on open space. Dhaka was like that in the past. It no longer is.

III
I don't foresee Dhaka accommodating open space soon. So, I try to make the best of what I can do. I go to Dhaka University, which is within walking and cycling distance from my house. I love the open space there. Having grown up in open spaces, I now appreciate the access to the free open space of Dhaka University, BUET and Dhaka Medical College campuses.

I'm no longer young enough to find a private tree for myself. However, I'm not too old that while I'm in this open space, I can't watch life pass me by in a city where I live, not because I love it, but because I have no other choice.

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OUR OBSESSION WITH MAKING ENTERTAINMENT EDUCATIONAL

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Shah Rukh Khan once quoted Samuel Goldwyn, who famously said, "Pictures are for entertainment; messages should be delivered by Western Union."

With the recent surge in fixation with messages in TV dramas or cinemas in Bangladesh, the quote somehow makes more sense than ever.

With a boom in the entertainment industry coupled with changing audience preferences, the portrayal of characters has changed over the years. Creators are now bold enough to write characters that are more authentic, real, and human. That's when characters start to trot around the greyer aspects of humanity, in contrast to the black-and-white portrayals of protagonists and antagonists in the past.

In recent years, accents on screen have become more authentic and natural. Sure, the authentic accent might sound "uglier" than the formal socially-accepted tone, but that's a compromise necessary for the sake of realism. If a director is dealing with characters from regions other than Dhaka, it is only fair that the characters will talk in the local dialect.

When the character of Chan Majhi from *Hawa*, played by Chanchal Chowdhury, curses his subordinates, it aids in building the world of fishermen in the Bay of Bengal and one that is honest to its roots. However, the dialogue was deemed to be crass and inappropriate for audiences, which resulted in backlash for the movie.

Similarly, when a protagonist has anger issues or emotional baggage like that of Afran Nisho in *Kaiser*, the creator is not necessarily telling you to idolise these aspects of Kaiser. Rather, these are tools to make the character more compelling. These traits also help the audience to understand Kaiser's state of mind and sympathise with the character in his state of vulnerability.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

In the web series *Mohanagar*, OC Harun, played by Mosharraf Karim, is a corrupt police officer who is willing to compromise anything for the sake of his greed, until his morality stands in his way. The display of OC Harun's greed, hypocrisy, and evil intentions was necessary for the audience to realise the gravity of the decision he took in the climax. But the portrayal was met with some negative reception due to his obscene nature.

That brings us to our blindness as an audience. Are we truly delusional enough to censor everything that portrays human beings as the vile and obscene species they are? If the characters are human, they are bound to have flaws, vulnerability, lust, greed, and everything evil that may be ingrained in human nature.

Maybe all forms of entertainment don't necessarily need to have a message in them.

Additionally, the censor board should, for once, just be a board about film certification and not unfairly ban whatever goes slightly against societal sensibilities. If a movie is deemed to be inappropriate for the younger audience, it should be certified accordingly, rather than be censored or banned.

Lastly, when it comes to entertainment not being watchable with the entire family, there's a very simple solution to it rather than wanting to cancel the show. Just don't watch it with your family.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com