



In today's fast paced world, children have somehow been placed in a hamster wheel, chasing too much at once.

UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY

Let the children live their childhood



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SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

A few days back, my younger sister came to me and asked how she could find the motivation to prepare for her upcoming exams, I found myself confused and unable to answer this simple question. My confusion did not stem from my inability to understand her vocabulary, or phrasing. Rather, it stemmed from my inability to comprehend why a 12-year-old was so distraught about preparing for her midterm exams. What stake is she considering and why does she feel demotivated in the first place?

Later when I revisited the conversation, she added, "Please do not say good grades, that does not help." And that is what directed me towards a point of reflection, that has fuelled this piece.

In today's fast-paced world, children have somehow been placed in a hamster wheel, chasing too much at once. Children are motivated from a very early age to not only put their full focus on school, but they are also expected to take up multiple "useful" extra-curricular activities. If that weren't enough, there is a looming expectation of exceling at each of these endeavours. What children decide to do out of interest, they must be the best at, and it is a waste of effort and their precious time otherwise.

Before we know it, we are subjecting children to the claws of capitalism, and the futile and ever exhausting cycle of achieving and feeling like we must achieve more. Thus, these children with packed and often overscheduled days have little to no time for recreation, personal development and self-

reflection, essentialities in the process of growth.

Instead of living through their childhood and letting them take the natural path towards becoming adults as the years go by, children are often expected to assume adult-level responsibilities to secure a "future," ignoring their age and all other variables that make this even more unfitting. Moreover, most of these children are not even aware of what it is exactly that they are geared towards.

There is this mysterious future that they must work towards, instilling the idea that their present has little to no value, and they must continue to chase something that may give them rewards in the future. Being an adult, I struggle to grasp that concept myself. So, how reasonable is it to expect children to understand the intricacies of a time-bound commitment they are making with themselves?

Not truly comprehending what it is they are working towards, most children tend to make a trade-off and form a reward system for themselves. They work towards goals set by others, and upon achieving them, validate themselves with the appreciation they receive due to the results they have managed to achieve. And thus starts an unhealthy cycle of validating one's existence with the hazardous combination of personal achievements and external validation.

It is universally known that parents want what's best for their children, and it is not in my intentions to assume or express that they have any other motivations in

doing these. Of course, parents do not want to take an experience as important as a childhood, away from their children.

It is understandable that they would like to prepare their children for the future and the unknowns that it holds. However, in the looming anxiety of the global economy, and the rapid changes the world seems to be undergoing, parents often do not realise how they end up transferring the weight of the anxiety onto their children.

When children are expected to burden themselves with adult levels of accountability and responsibilities, they also face troubles we usually associate with adults. Stress, anxiety, poor mental health, and a lack of self-esteem may be a few such impacts that could result from such a life set for the children amongst us.

Enforcing strict expectations and goals on children take away what little agency and choice they have. They lose the ability to discover their true interests, and selves. They are after all people, who deserve to set their own expectations from a life they are to lead. Infantilising them and making decisions on their behalf only takes away any shot they may have at learning accountability at a healthy pace.

Children truly believe their parents are omniscient. I know I did. We must understand that the ways of the world are forever changing, and they will continue to do so. Assuming responsibility for the future, for ourselves and the children, will not do much to put anyone ahead of this rat race.

We must allow children to read that comic, or paint a picture without the expectation of them becoming an illustrator or a future version of Salvador Dali someday. It is okay if that painting hangs in the living room till it eventually gets lost. It is okay for children to go through a process of trial and error to find out what they want to do. All that they do does not have to be set towards becoming someone or achieving something arbitrary.

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The ray of inclusion and empowerment



Rubana Huq is the current Vice-chancellor of Asian University for Women.

RUBANA HUQ

Pilots and often claim to be Work-in-Progress. Without undermining any initiative, I continue to wonder how long does it really take to change and pursue the single most important agenda of female empowerment. How do the lives of the underserved women change and who can potentially come forward and become a part of their story?

While feminism today has become the essential epithet that is de rigueur, while every star on stage, every actor on screen is proclaiming feminism on the red carpet, how far have we, in truth, travelled from where we were five decades ago?

The fact that in spite of Bangladesh having more than three million women in readymade garment sector, real empowerment in the real sense hasn't happened. Let alone female entrepreneurs, we lack female mid-level managers, and even female supervisors on the production lines. Is there any hope of this situation being

Tania got married and eventually had two children. She then tried her luck and landed up with the job of a quality inspector at a garment factory.

Sharmin Akter from Kishoreganj was the youngest amongst five siblings. With her father's death, her eldest sister dropped out of school and took a job at a garment factory to support the family. In 2016, Sharmin passed her HSC exams, followed her sister's footsteps and almost immediately started working in the Quality Department at a garment factory.

Our fifth hero, Mou was born in Noakhali but spent most of her formative years in Chattogram. With her parents divorced and with her mother's remarriage, she started living with her maternal grandparents. After her HSC exams in 2014, she found a job in the finishing department at a garment factory in Bangladesh.

And then, all their lives changed. At their factories, they heard about

56 readymade garment workers, who had little or no education. It was soon revealed that neither did they have any motivation nor courage to aspire for more. The concept of becoming an owner was alien and far removed from their reality behind sewing machines. In a separate phase, interviews were conducted with 37 former readymade garment workers who had received the same university degree, where, quite predictably, the cases again ended up being vastly different. Each one of them wanted to become an entrepreneur; each of them had the audacity to dream...

By then it was easy to establish that these respondents were clear cases of courage being fuelled by education.

In reality, societies don't change with measured interventions. Societies change when heroes like Sadeka, Farzana, Sharmin, Tania and Mou appear. Today, they have formed a company, framed the mission and vision, and have decided on their company being solely female. Today, these five are venturing out and looking at lands, buildings and planning the production lines.

In the cases of these five women, what is it that has them going? Is it their "poverty push" or the "opportunity pull"? These are questions that could be addressed through setting up guided entrepreneurship models



Societies change when heroes like Sadeka, Farzana, Sharmin, Tania and Mou appear.

PHOTO: COURTESY

remediated?

In response, let me share the story of the incredible six who neither fear their wings being melted or clogged while they soar to the skies. These five incredibly gifted women have had extremely challenging lives. Sadeka was born in Sunanganj, had a father who was paralysed and in spite of her good grades in HSC, had no other option but to join a factory in Dhaka where she worked as a quality inspector.

Farjana from Mymensingh had a father who gambled and was unemployed. She ran away from home, escaped marriage and finally passed her HSC exams in 2015. Wanting to pursue higher studies, she started working as a floorman at a factory just to support her tuition fees.

Daughter of a farmer, Tania was born and raised in the remote village of Bhaturia in Sirajganj, had five brothers and sisters. In spite of hardship, Tania got admitted to Rajapur Degree College. Three months into college,

a university which was offering admissions to their "Pathways for Promise" programme that offered to prep them for admission. All of them sat for admission tests in their factories, got accepted to the pre-graduate programme and miracle followed right after...

In 2020, Sadeka graduated from Asian University for Women (AUW) as the Valedictorian of her class. She majored in Economics and minored in Development Studies. Two years later, Farjana majored in Philosophy, Politics and Economics and minored in Development Studies, while Tania, Sharmin and Mou are all currently completing their undergraduate degree with a major in Economics and a minor in Finance and Mathematics.

And today, their dream is not about getting employed; today their dream is about employing more women by becoming garment factory owners themselves.

Out of sheer curiosity, at one point, I conducted multiple interviews with

that could potentially give birth to entrepreneurs. These models could help us ideate and implement mechanisms to empower women in low-end manufacturing, by providing reskilling through education, training and policies based on industry-academic partnership models. These models could also be based on the theory of guided preparation, where contextual learning practice will lead to achievement orientation.

In this particular case, our heroes, armed by education, prompted by encouragement and institutional support, march on. With a registered company, they have submitted the project to a financial institution for review.

What next? Which financial institution will support these women? Which brand will book their capacity? And of course, how quickly will society endorse these heroes and offer a stamp of support? Fingers crossed.



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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Flock members

6 Snake's poison

11 Alaskan native

12 Eat away

13 "Ninotchka" star

14 Christens

15 Baby-sitter's bane

17 Snaky shape

18 Treat for a dog

22 Lotion ingredient

23 Thrifty

27 Forehead cover

29 Let up

30 Surround

32 Gust

33 Most of the U.S., to Hawaiians

35 Member of the

DOWN

1 Fall behind

2 Pie - mode

3 Sea, in French

4 Chewable stuff

5 Tale

6 Coastal county of California

7 Memorable time

8 Alaskan city

9 Lofty poems

force

38 Spruce or sequoia

39 "Witness" group

41 Brief job

45 Site

46 Singing voice

47 Computer key

48 Baseball's Koufax

10 Disorder

16 Pound sound

18 Movie pig

19 Verve

20 Drawn out

21 Drink containing tapioca

24 Charity event

25 Heaps

26 Smutty

28 Spread thickly

31 Pine's kin

34 Bird homes

35 Stalactite setting

36 Troubling sign

37 Cream buy

40 Take to court

42 Quaint lodgings

43 Silent assent

44 Attempt

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

BRAND IDIOM DENNIS LOU ESS DOREMI WAY RAMADAN IKE PAGODA VOLTA TIDES ATEUP EVENTS LATTE

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

THE GENERAL WONDERS IF THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH HIM

HOW COULD HE FIND OUT?

10/13

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

MY BEDROOM COULDN'T UPLIFT ME.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT WAS A THING.

11/13