

# Maximalism in Bangladeshi culture and how we make sense of it

**AHMED NUZHA OISHEE**

Architectural Digest Videos on YouTube where celebrities give viewers an inside-look into their homes has enticed me for a while. Some of their homes boast very minimalistic settings, in decor and practices, to the point that they seem far too austere to incorporate into my Bangladeshi way of life. As I looked to embrace the noble ethos of minimalism, that one should surround their lives with simplicity and essentiality, the maximalism in our culture became apparent to me.

Maximalism as an art form is the aesthetic of excess, where “more is more”. It embraces clutter, excess, mismatched aesthetics, and pieces that have emotional significance or tell a story.

Bangladeshi maximalism is more inherent than intentional. Bangladeshi homes are methodically crammed with souvenirs of the past. At home, my late-grandmother’s tableware lies towered besides her old *paan daan* piled alongside everyday tools. My mother’s Citycell phone from the ‘90s is neatly tucked beside an equally archaic cassette player she received as gift from an expatriate relative.

Most households find creative use for disposable commodities. Empty ice-cream boxes and jars may store anything from seasonings to woodwork nails. The austere minimalist interior is quite unfeasible in a



ILLUSTRATION: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

Bangladeshi context. For instance, most urban Bangladeshis living with a large family cannot afford having unused open floor plans. How long till someone with a 9 to 5 job, racing against time to avoid Dhaka traffic, becomes exasperated navigating through a home where all essentials are hidden from plain sight in an attempt to declutter?

These theoretically go against minimalist intent – an unobtrusive visual environment, ridden of redundancy, stripped to the bare essentials.

Maximalism extends beyond décor and

design. “Bengali Keta” or “Bengali culture of eating” is steeped in it. Our etiquette seeks fulfilment in hospitality. Bangladeshis lay out their fancy crockery and prepare overindulgent servings of food for guests, in amounts that could otherwise sustain a family for days. Panta-Ilish is a traditional dish during *Pahela Baishakh* and yet the payroll of citizens working in blue-collar professions cannot cover the cost of the expensive Ilish.

Multitudinous maximalism extends to weddings and social celebrations. Inviting everyone-and-their-mother and extravagant

hospitality becomes customary to avoid social stigma. Such events need to have the most of everything. *Biryani* must accompany *polao* and over-the-top arrangements seemingly portray one’s social standing. The older generation still considers empty handed visits from guests and absence of ceremonial presents as a lack of goodwill.

However, maximalism offers our culture exposure at times. For instance, *Jamdani*, an arduously and intricately designed clothing, weaved by mostly underprivileged weavers, is a luxury item only the financially solvent Bangladeshis can afford and wear on selective occasions. But it has given our heritage international recognition.

The post-liberation war era had inspired expressionistic freedom from dogmatic Pakistani bindings. People embraced psychedelic patterns, exuberant colours, funky and mismatched attires. Current fashion aesthetic still derives its eclectic inspiration from imperial occupation and colonisers. The extravagance and onslaught of colours at *Noboborsho* or *Pahela Falgun* celebrations remain unmatched.

While maximalism is known to create wastage and overstimulation, minimalism is accused of stripping away life and unfairly decreeing what’s necessary and what’s not. And when the boundaries are murky, it’s difficult to find a middle ground in an ever-evolving culture.

# How the fantasy behind “men written by women” falls short of expectations

**SARA KABIR**

“Men written by women” is a loosely defined concept which started gaining popularity with the rise of 2020-2021 TikTok trends and has now become a part of the general Gen-Z internet lexicon. According to the Internet, the trope describes men who fit the female gaze and are figuratively, and often literally, written by a woman. They are socially aware, aren’t afraid to show their emotions, and break gender norms. Often, they seem too good to be true, since, after all, most of them are made-up fictional characters.

Fictional men written by women are undoubtedly some of the most detailed and genuine characters to exist in literature, so it is no wonder why we are so enamoured with them. Think of Four from *Divergent*, Peeta Mellark from *The Hunger Games*, and of course Fitzwilliam Darcy from Jane Austen’s 19th century classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*. These characters have their own motivations and complex backstories that make them strong and multi-faceted, making them fun and compelling to read about.

However, the concept is taken a bit less



literally as videos of popular male celebrities like Harry Styles, Timothée Chalamet, Hozier, members of BTS, and more are rampant under the TikTok hashtag currently amassing over 120 million views.

Despite being real people, the internet has unanimously dubbed these men as written by women since they seem to fit the criteria for the fictional trope. However, we don’t know any of these celebrities personally. So, we can only assume their personalities from what they share with the

world. Our classification of them as “men written by women” is a projection of our fantasies based on parasocial relationships and desire for perfectionism.

But putting real men on the same level as fictional ones can sometimes be problematic, as they antiquate stereotypes of idealising men for doing the bare minimum. An ugly side of this can be seen in the travesty of the “wife guys” – male celebrities heavily publicising their obsession with their wives and monetising their supposedly perfect relationship which, unsurprisingly, often does not end well.

The opposite side of the coin, “women written by men”, has been a topic of much contention for decades online but has recently resurfaced to describe the

unrealistic, sexist outlook male directors and writers often seem to have of women on and off screen.

Both tropes are embodiments of the male and female gaze and all the fantasies they encompass respectively. While the former pigeonholes women into one-dimensional fantasies, the latter seeks to redeem men by infusing their fictional selves with more warmth.

Of course, that doesn’t mean male authors are incapable of writing a three-dimensional female character, or that female authors don’t also hypersexualise their male characters sometimes, but those are the outliers, not the norm. This paints a bleak picture of how society views gender roles and how opposing genders view themselves. In other words, the “men written by women” trope paints a utopian vision of what masculinity could be, while also highlighting the tragedy of fragile masculinity and contemporary gender norms.

*Sara Kabir is a dreamer, a Literature graduate, and a writer. She is often found juggling academics and her countless hobbies. Follow her @scarletfangirl on Instagram for more.*