



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The deal with our love for bargaining

KOUSHIN UNBER

Every Bangladeshi has been exposed to the beauty of bargaining or *damadami* in some form or the other. The culture of bargaining here stands out because instead of trying to get a good deal at assets like cars, enterprise, or wholesale goods, as is normal for most western nations, people here practice bargaining for the smallest of goods, and they do so with apt skill and theatrics. At this point, it's fair to say bargaining has been ingrained into our culture, so much so, that it may even be considered an essential survival skill by some.

It is a pretty well-known fact that in Bangladesh you can haggle the price of almost anything, so long as they are informal goods sold at local shops, and no one does it better than our mothers. Knowing how to get a good deal automatically grants you a status of street-smartness.

According to an article by *CBS News*, we are chemically programmed to respond to lowered prices. When we see products on sale, successfully bargain something to a cheaper price, or even get a good deal for a thrifted item, hormones in our brain get activated. Dopamine is one of the biggest chemical rewards we have, which is why we keep coming back and feel inclined to bargain wherever we go.

We also get a type of adrenaline rush when getting a good bargain. The false last offers, the uncaring walk off, and the classic comparison with the other store that totally promised a much lower price, all seem to be part of an elaborate unspoken routine that seems very enticing to perform.

Due to its constant reward mechanism,

bargaining can get addictive. You might even find yourself arguing over the price of a commodity not because the original asking price was too high, but just because you can. This can create leeway to a detrimental habit of over-haggling for every little thing. A lot of the informal goods we buy come from shops or vans on the sides of roads. One of the most common instances during which people bargain is while giving or setting rickshaw fares.

However, the addictive nature of price haggling often creates an unshakeable habit in people who then resort to putting their skills to practice wherever possible, even for the cheapest of goods.

It's important to remember that for a lot of us bargaining comes from a place of habit rather than an actual need to cut costs. So when we try to lower the prices of goods we buy from relatively less well-off people, we end up hurting their incomes. The money is of higher value to them than it is to us, and incessant bargaining can put them into a tough spot since these are often their only sources of income.

Haggling isn't supposed to be about taking advantage of someone, nor is it an opportunity to get away with goods at an unreasonable price and rob the seller of their money. It's a timeless survival skill that ensures sellers don't take advantage of you, not the other way around.

Reference:
CBS News. (December 15, 2013). *How a great sale affects your brain*

Koushin Unber is afraid that she might be peaking at eighteen and it's all downhill from here. Send obscure film theories to her at koushinunber27@gmail.com

Can Bangladeshi comedians do better?

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

Making people laugh is hard, especially at a time when many people's happiness is based on the premise that *things could have been a lot worse*. Comedians are artists in their own right, and with the meteoric rise of OTT platforms, this art of making people laugh is as popular now as ever.

I, personally, love watching comedy specials, especially those featuring Asian comedians. As a self-proclaimed comedy connoisseur, it is hard not to draw comparisons. The stand-up comedy scene in Bangladesh is still in its early stages, and with the arrival of young talents, the industry does show a lot of promise. Yet, many would agree that Bangladeshi comedians aren't quite up there with their other Asian counterparts.

Comedy specials are OTT platforms' bread and butter, and like everywhere else, OTT platforms are gaining extreme popularity in Bangladesh. Yet, comedy specials featuring Bangladeshi comedians on these OTT platforms are virtually non-existent. Are Bangladeshi comedians simply not good enough, or are there other reasons behind this absence of stand-up comedy shows?

Solely blaming the comedians would be pretty harsh. Given the lack of sponsors, venues and other limitations to monetising the art of making people laugh, young Bangladeshi comedians often struggle to gain ground, and newer talents hesitate to step into the scene.

However, despite the subjective nature of comedy, the common consensus is that Bangladeshi comedians can do better. While some have carved out a niche for themselves and have gained popularity, the Bangladeshi comedy scene is far from being as successful as it is in the rest of the world.

Bangladeshi comedians have developed a brand of comedy that is very punch-line-oriented. The punch lines generate some laughter, and that's pretty much it. It goes something like this:

Comedian: Roses are red, violets are blue, your phone is smart, why aren't you?

Audience: Hahaha

On the flip side, comedians elsewhere choose to tell stories, often personal, to keep the audience engaged. The story has multiple humorous sides, and the comedian delivers it in a way that makes it funnier than it originally would have been.

The jokes coming out of comedy specials are often more memorable since they make you draw from your experiences, and as a result, the audience relates better to these jokes. I was watching Indian comedian Vir Das's comedy special *Landing* on Netflix the other day. It was a pure roller-coaster ride, and I thoroughly enjoyed the entirety of it. It really was what made me think about how Bangladeshi stand-up comedy is different.

Comedy is subjective, but most would agree that Bangladeshi comedians have a lot of room for improvement. Stand-up comedy is a booming industry around the world. For comedy to become a full-fledged industry rather than a budding scene here in Bangladesh, comedians have to do better in terms of the quality and relatability of their content. Once we have objectively funnier jokes, the rest might as well fall into place.

Bipra Prasun Das cracks lame jokes and thinks he is funnier than most. Prove him wrong by sending him memes and puns at bipraprasun22@gmail.com



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