

# Sharing my birthday with my mum's death anniversary

PUJA SARKAR

*She laid there, not entirely in her senses. I remember the sound of her gasps and my sister trying to place the oxygen mask on her. My mum, in pain, and likely very confused, kept refusing the mask. I remember thinking that maybe if I went up to my mum, who was at death's door, and said, "Ma, wake up. It's my birthday," she'd magically snap out of it. I wish I had taken that shot but seeing her like that was frightening. Not knowing what or why this was happening on that day put my nine-year-old brain in limbo.*

That's the last memory I have of her. This January 16 marked her sixteenth year of passing, and also my twenty-fifth year of existence. Sixteen years have passed and I've lived this moment more than sixteen times with the same confusion and fear nine-year-old me felt. You'd think after such a long time, I'd learn to accept it.

I know now that she was terminally ill for a very long time and her death was inevitable, but I didn't back then. I didn't know I'd regret not visiting her in the hospital more often after school. In fact, that's the only regret I have.

So, that brings me to my question, what do I do on my birthday? How am I supposed to feel?

In short, I'm conflicted. With two voices in my head constantly battling each other, the day always takes a turn no matter what. One tells me that I ought to celebrate with friends and family, the other tells me I should grieve to my heart's content. The latter is always stronger.

Every year I get into a week-long fight with my relatives over not cutting a cake at midnight. Even though I hated the cakes and being the centre of attention, I couldn't hurt the ones I love because of something they don't entirely understand. They had no selfish or malicious intent,

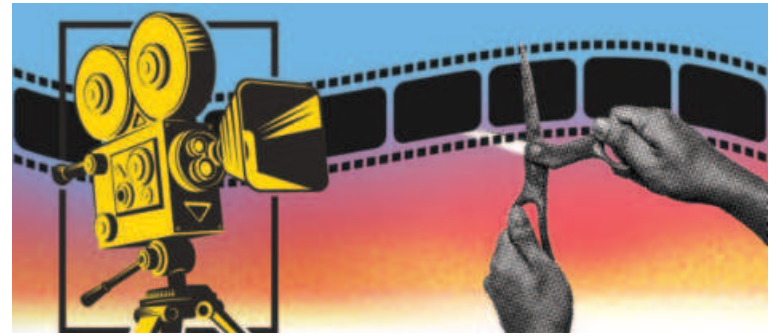
but the voice in my head tells me, "You told them how much you hate this and don't want this. You told them you wanted this day to be like any other, nothing special."

I know that even after such a long time, I don't like celebrating my birthday yet. A part of me feels that I have the right to be sad if I want to, and I don't owe it to anyone to fake a smile, at least on this day.

Given her death was bound to come, I wish she had died sooner. I wouldn't have small memories to reminisce upon. Wanting to forget your mother just so you don't feel the pain anymore is selfish and not something I'm proud to feel.

Life and death coexist. In a sense, a birthday is a fleeting moment of joy and we go back to our normal lives the next day. Death, on the other hand, has more of a long-lasting impact. You feel their absence every day. You think about them for a split second and when the tears blind you, you go back to focusing on something else. Over time, you move on. As for myself, time hasn't fixed anything.

*Puja does nothing but read Gaiman and drinks unhealthy amounts of coffee. Send her cat photos at*

ILLUSTRATION: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

## OPINION

# How censorship is hampering the Bangladeshi film industry

RAIAN ABEDIN

After the pandemic, Bangladesh's film industry has managed to release multiple feature-length and short films that have seen success both on a national and international level. The industry seems to be growing at a never-before-seen pace, reaching audiences it once would have struggled to find. Despite everything, there is a giant obstacle that seems to stop the industry from growing as it potentially could: the Bangladesh Film Censor Board.

All movies deserve to have the freedom to tell a variety of stories given no explicitly illegal or morally abhorrent activity is happening underfoot. No matter what community these voices may belong to, there should be no barrier to having their stories heard. Not only does this help Bangladesh's film industry attract cinema lovers by diversifying voices, but it also helps spread these stories to an international audience.

For instance, *My Bicycle* written and directed by Aung Rakhine, is an independent film made entirely by non-professional filmmakers that saw significant international acclaim. The film saw screenings in festivals across the world, and yet never had a proper commercial release in Bangladesh because of bans placed by the film censor board.

Examples like these are common, as the film censor board tends to take archaic measures to prevent certain stories from ever being visible to the public. This is simply not healthy, neither artistically, nor from a business perspective as these very movies that the censor board tries so hard to block are the ones that end up receiving massive critical acclaim and commercial success worldwide. When you have films made about your country that are celebrated everywhere except in your own nation, you have clearly failed to give space to stories that demand being heard.

Another victim of the film censor board's outdated measures would be Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's *Saturday Afternoon*, a joint production of Bangladesh, Germany, and Russia. A rare case of multiple international publishers and producers choosing to work on Bangladeshi cinema, this was en route to make history. The movie went ahead to win awards in France, Japan, and Russia. In Bangladesh, it was banned from releasing for three years until numerous protests by the director and various netizen groups cleared its release. However, at the time of writing this article, the movie has been called for re-examination, further delaying its release.

The fact that any movie has to go through so many hurdles to tell the story they want to tell will never make for a healthy scene for films in this country.

At the very least, the business of it all should at least make the censor board think otherwise. Especially in today's age, where people flock to the cinemas, making more movies available is simply beneficial for all parties. Filmmakers go to great lengths to tell stories about certain topics with utmost importance. It is completely natural for some of these films to be regarded as not safe for audiences of all ages. If the censor board continues to take drastic measures in banning their release instead of having open communication with the directors or having a proper age restriction system, the growth of films in this country will come to a standstill. Stories demand to live in the minds of the viewers.

*Raian is making a list of his favourite love poems in celebration of February, send some poems his way at IG @raian\_is\_burning*



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA