



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Kinds of toxic masculinity you might not know about

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AZNEEF CHOWDHURY

When the term “toxic masculinity” is mentioned, most people tend to think of men who exhibit extremely virulent behaviour or refuse to display any kind of emotion to their peers. Whilst these traits are common among men who possess toxic masculine attitudes, the issue isn’t limited to these symptoms only.

Toxic masculinity is a spectrum, and many men possess underlying traits of unhealthy masculinity, which affect their lives as well as the lives of the people they’re connected with. Here are a few kinds of toxic masculinity you might not know about.

Facing academic challenges

Most men are often encouraged to conceal their emotions and avoid openly speaking about their weaknesses. This practice carries on in the academic world, and many male students refrain from approaching teachers or their peers in fear of being perceived as weak or being labelled as unintelligent.

Anti-social behaviour is heavily promoted by toxic masculine ideologies, and students following such mindsets avoid communicating with classmates in fear of being judged. Consequently, these students attempt to resolve their academic difficulties all by themselves, and end up failing at it, ultimately resulting in varying degrees of academic challenges.

Being overly workaholic

In traditional gender roles, men are usually expected to be the breadwinners of the family. For most men, this means being able to garner immense amounts of wealth and success while they’re young in order to conform to social norms.

Whilst having ambition and being determined about your career are healthy traits to have, some people abandon their work ethic and sacrifice their social life to an excessive extent for financial gains. These men often resort to working excessively and put spending time with friends and family on the afterburner and can even partake in shady activities to boost their wealth. Not only can these practices result in deteriorating relationships, but the lack of work ethic can also prove to be detrimental to society as a whole.

Taking unnecessary risks

Almost all important decisions in our lives involve a risk in some form or other, and accounting for these risks to make the decision is a skill that most of us possess to some extent. A wide demographic of men with toxic masculine mindsets, however, overrule this instinctual fight or flight response of theirs and dive headfirst into overly dangerous actions and decisions as a testification of their masculinity.

Not only does this pose a great personal risk to them, but also burdens their friends and family with the consequences of their actions. Driving dangerously or resorting to violent measures as a solution are some examples of such a trait.

Not learning to accept others’ opinions

Having a wide range of opinions among people is an incredibly common circumstance in society. Being respectful of this large spectrum of viewpoints is a requirement to have great relationships in work or personal life.

Many people who view themselves as the pinnacle of masculinity, however, ignore this requirement to make people perceive them as “unyielding and courageous.” This attitude is also indicative of bigger personality issues, such as having a toxic masculine mindset.

There is, however, an asterisk to all of this. Toxic masculinity is an incredibly nuanced subject and is often tied up with a lot of other factors. Simply seeing some of the aforementioned traits in a person and labelling them as toxic masculine can come off as ignorant and offensive. Thus, it is important to be holistic about their personality before coming to a conclusion.

Azneef keeps switching from one incomplete task to another. Remind him to finish his work at itsazneefchowdhury@gmail.com

Experiencing Bangla literature as someone bad at Bangla

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

Honestly, it felt a lot like viewing the world through a lazy eye while keeping the dominant one covered. The images formed were blurry and sorely lacking in clarity. Unlike English, the words did not spring out energetically from the pages and waltz about to life. Oftentimes, I had to re-read a paragraph twice or even three times to render the scene clearly in my mind’s eye. To put it simply, I was bad at Bangla. And the reason behind that was even simpler – Bangla felt as tedious as its textbooks and as strict as its teachers.

Much to my relief, I bid farewell to studying Bangla as the curtains fell on my O levels. And just as it left through the door, a sly, miniscule curiosity for Bangla literature crept in through the window. Like most people, I started with Humayun Ahmed.

Despite my initial slowness, I was done with the first few books of the *Himu* series in very little time. I dipped myself into the enigmatic mysteries of *Misir Ali* as well and then waded through the likes of *Omanush* and *Megher Opor Bari* – each an absolute gem.

There is something special about his work – a greatness that is just as easily accessible as it is elusive. But Humayun Ahmed, despite his legendary status and contributions, was just the tip of the iceberg. In the rich world of Bangla literature, there was so much that awaited me, and so little that I had experienced. My father’s shelves – holding almost four times as many Bangla books as mine did English – beckoned me to come and pay a visit. It was a *dawat*, a *nimontron* that I just couldn’t refuse.

In the past two years, I’ve managed to read thoroughly through some of Satyajit Ray’s works, particularly the *Feluda* series. Metaphorically speaking, I’ve also had a tooth or two broken, courtesy of *Galpaguchcha*, a collection of Rabindranath Tagore’s short stories.



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Then there is Akhteruzzaman Elias’s *Chilekothar Sepai*, a tale of depravity and desire that breathes life into the tumultuous times of the Mass Uprising of 1969. With this one, I can’t even remember how many times I’ve had to refer to my phone’s Bangla Dictionary.

As someone who grew up reading American and British novels, these small experiences that I have accrued with Bangla hold enormous value. Aside from the satisfaction of slowly getting better at something I was once terrible at, I have also gained the unique insight that only literature can give. I can now imagine Dhaka without its chronic traffic congestion, a city yet to become the bustling metropolis of millions. I can see Kolkata, the erstwhile capital of the erstwhile British Raj, the centre of Bengal’s intellectual and artistic revival in the nineteenth century. I can view the scenic beauty of the countryside as well as contemplate the friction between the simple joy of rural life and its hideous despair.

There is one regret that I have, though. In what feels like a distant time, when I wasn’t nearly as busy, nor did I have as many responsibilities, I wish my journey had begun then.

Nayem is a highly unproductive literature nerd. Tell him to finish what he started at nayemhaider90@gmail.com

“Teaching Literature and Interdisciplinarity”: int’l conference at EWU explores the importance of language

RAIAN ABEDIN

English is inherently a subject with interdisciplinarity and variety. In an exploration of this very idea, on July 28, the Association of Teachers of Literatures in English, Bangladesh (ATLEB) and East West University (EWU) inaugurated the two-day international conference titled “Teaching Literature and Interdisciplinarity.”

The conference, as a whole, was sprawling with ideas and conversations regarding literature, how we perceive it, and how we internalise it, along with the many ways an interdisciplinary look at literature has become imperative in today’s climate. In fact, one of the key points highlighted in the inauguration ceremony was how interdisciplinarity breaks down boundaries and provides a strong foundation for the future of education and knowledge, where collaboration is important.

Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Professor Emeritus at Dhaka University, attended the conference as the Chief Guest and took the stage to speak about the inherent interdisciplinarity present within the world of Literature.

“Literature connects us to the greatest creative minds, to nature,

to the environment, all in an effort to become better persons. It is more than a piece of aesthetic curiosity. Literary pieces are rich with historical or ideological contexts.” He then went on to highlight the duty literature serves in modern society, “The hope lies in the creation and reading of literature, to uphold the humanities. To drive capitalism away and replace it with social ownership.”

Syed Manzur Elahi, Chairperson, Board of Trustees, EWU; Prof. Tahmina Ahmed, Convener, ATLEB and Convener of the conference; Dr Abu Shahid Abdullah, Co convener of the conference, and Dr Farzana Akhter, Dean, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, EWU, all made their appearances in the ceremony along short and impactful speeches that explored the core of studying literature.

In one of the keynote Speeches, Dr Claire Chambers, a Professor at the University of York, spoke of the importance of literature as a way to break borders – both in academia and in cultures. The idea of transnationalism was brought up as a way through which authors managed to cross cultural borders, citing Tahmima Anam as a writer who has gained fame in India despite her Bangladeshi roots.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Later, Dr Chambers went on to speak about the importance of breaking down borders without relying on colonial roots.

“I think what we should be aiming for is bypassing the West altogether sometimes. I’ve been really amazed to see several cases of translation occur from Arabic directly to Mandarin and the audience that it has.” She further added, “I’ve given

three talks in my time here (in Bangladesh) so far, and I was challenged to have my mind opened with the conversations we’ve had. This conference is perhaps the pinnacle, and I’m amazed by the speakers we’ve gotten to listen to so far.”

When speaking of interdisciplinarity, lots of ideas come up. Indeed, the very concept of interdisciplinarity is purposefully

vague to allow scholars and researchers to glean their own meaning out of it. However, on this note, the Keynote Speaker on the second day of the event, Dr Rajeev S. Patke, Director of the Division of Humanities at Yale-NUS College, shared his thoughts on interdisciplinarity and the vague nature surrounding it.

“It is difficult to practise interdisciplinarity, and even more

difficult to do it successfully. In order to practise any form of interdisciplinarity, one must first develop in a single field well, and then they can expand their horizons. But not because of the sake of being interdisciplinary, but because the nature of their exploration requires it. Most areas of study require a lot of time, so where does one find the time to acquire interdisciplinarity? The danger of falling between two stools is quite considerable.”

The keynote speeches of both days were followed by a series of paper and poster presentations. The topics of the papers were as vast and deep as the very idea of literature itself, ranging from analysis of poetry to pop culture sitcoms to artificial intelligence. The presentations make it quite clear that literature and literary analysis are embedded all around us, and are even important in other fields of study. As such, the pursuit of knowledge in the world of literature is ever expanding, and platforms provided to scholars and researchers only allow for the envelope to be pushed further to discover something new about the very nature of humanity.

Raian is a contributing writer at Campus.