



# LIGHTS, CAMERA, SATIRE

## Masking serious messages in the veil of humour

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In the world of film, satire and humour have long been utilised as powerful tools for not solely entertaining but also delivering meaningful societal commentary. A well-crafted joke or satirical scene can disarm audiences, prompting them to reflect on societal norms and question their own beliefs. By cloaking serious messages in the veil of humour, filmmakers can effectively challenge the status quo and address pertinent issues without being overtly didactic.

Bengali cinema, with its rich storytelling tradition, has been no stranger to the art of using humour and satire to convey thought-provoking messages while entertaining its audiences. This article aims to explore how the use of humour and satire in movies allows filmmakers across the world to convey thought-provoking messages while entertaining their audiences.

### The power of satire

Satire, as an artistic expression, serves as a mirror for society, holding up a distorted reflection of our collective values and behaviours. Through humour, filmmakers can draw attention to the absurdities and hypocrisies that often go unnoticed. Satire becomes a means to unmask the faults

and flaws that plague society, encouraging audiences to engage in critical thinking and introspection.

A classic example of using satire to comment on societal norms can be found in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, which was released in 1964. The film was originally envisioned as a dramatic look at the Cold War, loosely based on the novel *Red Alert* by Peter George, but Kubrick felt it would be more effective as satire. This British dark comedy parodies the Cold War tensions and the nuclear arms race, using humour to underscore the absurdity of political brinkmanship and the dangers of unchecked power.

The landscape of Bengali cinema is no different when it comes to using satire to critique prevailing social and political issues. Satyajit Ray, a legendary filmmaker in Bengali cinema, used satire effectively in his film *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*The Land of the Diamond King*), released in 1980. This sequel to *Goopy Gynne Bagha Byne* (1969) humorously criticised totalitarian regimes and the abuse of power. The heart of the narrative lies within a mesmerising fantasy realm governed by an unrelenting and self-absorbed ruler portrayed brilliantly by Utpal

Dutt. Delving deeper, the film artfully unfolds as a thought-provoking political allegory, drawing parallels to the historical period of Emergency under Indira Gandhi's reign. Furthermore, Ray skillfully weaves a broader exploration of totalitarianism, leaving audiences with an insightful reflection on this



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

governing ideology. Through the character of the tyrannical King, Ray provided a sharp commentary on the dangers of unchecked authority and the suppression of dissenting voices.

### Using humour to address social issues

Humour has a unique ability to address uncomfortable or sensitive social issues without alienating audiences. Comedy can create a safe space to discuss topics that

may otherwise be met with resistance or defensiveness.

The political satire film *Mad e in Bangladesh*, directed by Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, was released in 2007 after being delayed by a year because of opposition from the Bangladesh Film Censor Board over the contents of the film. *Mad e in Bangladesh* ensembles a stellar cast starring Zahid Hasan, Shahiduzzaman Selim, Tariq Anam Khan, Fazlur Rahman Babu, and Hasan Masood, among others. The story revolves around an apparently passive young man, Khorshed, played brilliantly by Zahid Hasan, who comes to Dhaka from a rural area looking for a job and a better life. Farooki delivered an entertaining drama that is rooted in truth, well-fitted to our socio-political context, and scathing in its criticism of power-politics and the flaws within our system. The film remains as controversial yet as relevant as the year of its release.

Directed by Shiboprosad Mukherjee and Nandita Roy, the Tollywood film *Belasheshe* (2015) humorously delves into the complexities of family dynamics and the changing societal roles of women. Through the character of a middle-aged woman who seeks divorce after decades of marriage, the film challenges societal expectations and highlights the importance of individual agency and happiness.

**Subverting stereotypes through comedy**

By playfully subverting established norms, filmmakers can encourage empathy and understanding while celebrating individuality. Bengali cinema has been at the forefront of breaking stereotypes and challenging societal norms through comedy.

*Bhooter Bhabishyat* (2012), directed by Anik Dutta, blends comedy with supernatural elements to deliver a satirical commentary on the urbanisation and gentrification of Kolkata. The movie humorously portrays ghosts from different eras of Kolkata's history, symbolising the lost essence of the city in the face of rapid modernisation.

Humour and satire are potent weapons in a filmmaker's arsenal, enabling them to address serious social issues while keeping audiences engaged and entertained. By skillfully using humour and satire, filmmakers can spark conversations, challenge societal norms, and encourage introspection among viewers. Through the lens of comedy, these movies shed light on the human condition, making us laugh while subtly prodding us to contemplate the state of the world we live in. As we continue to enjoy these films, let us also recognise their deeper messages and the powerful role humour plays in shaping our perception of society.

# NEWS

## Raising voice

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Rajan planned the killing after he came to know that Saiful would go abroad, Moin said.

The attackers were led by Rajan who used to run a local rickshaw garage and was involved in drug dealing, robbery, and theft.

There are at least five cases against him for possession of firearms, drugs, and explosives.

The other arrestees include Zane Alam, Sumon Liton Hossain, Dipu, Sarwar Akand, and Sajeeb.

Rab recovered an iron rod, a broken cricket bat, and a truncheon used to hit the victim, Moin said.

"Saiful used to protest against criminal activities and drug trade in his neighbourhood. He took various steps to build a society free of drugs and crime. He also assisted law enforcement by providing information about drug dealers," he added.

Earlier, suspects Zane Alam, Sumon and his mother were arrested, and they also thought Saiful was behind the arrests.

Rab said Alam and Sumon are accused in four criminal cases. The other arrestees are also involved in drug dealing and criminal activities, Moin added.

## They've been framed

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According to police, the tour was led by Afif Anwar, a fourth-year student of Buet, who is also a leader of Shirbir's Buet unit.

The Daily Star could not independently verify the claim.

In the case statement, police said that the arrestees admitted they gathered there to commit terrorist activities to disrupt public safety, damage public property, carry out anti-state activities, and create political unrest.

According to the seizure list, police seized Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir's booklets, forms, leaflets, syllabus, books, and cell phones used by the arrestees.

But Junayed, brother of Ali Ammar Moaz, said, "Having failed to find anything on their mobile phones, police collected those [leaflets, booklets, etc.] from different sources, including the internet."

The guardians also met with the Buet authorities yesterday, who assured them of justice.

Sunamganj Superintendent of Police (SP) and two Additional SPs did not respond to our calls for comments.

## Cardiac stents to become

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Of those, the base price of Resolute Integrity -- one of the most-used stents in Bangladesh -- will be reduced to \$500 from \$880.

Similarly, Resolute Onyx's base price for stent has been lowered to \$900 from \$1,150, while that of Resolute Trucor's -- which is not yet supplied to Bangladesh -- will be \$450.

Local representatives of different stent manufacturers from the European Union, Japan, and other countries have also agreed to bring down the base prices of their products.

All European-origin stents, authorised by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), will have base prices ranging from \$450 to \$500.

Meanwhile, the base prices of the EU-origin stents without FDA approval will range from \$400 to \$450. The same will be applicable to stents produced in Japan.

Prices of stents manufactured in other countries will range from \$300 to \$350.

On June 25, Abbott Laboratories and Boston Scientific -- two world-leading stent producers and suppliers -- agreed to the price reduction of eight kinds of stents, which are largely used, in another meeting at the DGDA. This reduction will be effective from September 1.

At the moment, as there is no local producer, Bangladesh remains fully dependent on foreign suppliers to meet the demand for around 45,000 cardiac stents per year.

The DGDA did not have any role in the price setting of cardiac stents before a markup formula was imposed on April 19, 2017.

In a joint effort, the DGDA and stent suppliers consulted a technical

committee of cardiologists, formed by the directorate itself.

They reached a unanimous decision to set a 1.42 percent markup for cardiac stents.

Since then, the stent prices have remained unchanged until October last year.

But, to the dismay of patients, the prices went up as the DGDA made adjustments to align those with the depreciation of taka against the dollar.

The technical committee argued that the prices can be reduced if the DGDA bargains with the main companies and sets a price cap like it was done in India, where the prices range from Rs 9,842 to Rs 35,835.

Against this backdrop, the DGDA and the committee held a series of meetings with the representatives of major stent-producing companies.

Prof Afzalur Rahman, one of the members of the technical committee who attended yesterday's meeting, told The Daily Star, "This will have a positive impact on the country's cardiac care."

Following the June 25 meeting, Maj Gen Mohammad said they have decided to revise the markup by reducing the retailer commission to five percent from 11.5 and proposing that National Board of Revenue reduce the duties and taxes.

"We already sent a proposal to the NBR for this, but they have yet to agree."

Humayun Kabir, secretary of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star, "The government-imposed duties and taxes on stents should not be over five percent. We demand the reduction to relieve cardiac patients and their families from financial burdens."

## Tight security

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police commissioner (crime) of Rangpur Metropolitan.

Bangladesh Railway will ply eight special trains from six districts to ferry the people to Rangpur today.

"It will be a historical rally -- the party is expecting around 1 million people," said Jahangir Kabir Nanak, an AL presidium member.

During her visit, the PM would also be inaugurating 27 projects involving

Tk 1,240 crore.

The projects include Sheikh Russel Media Centre, Sheikh Russell Indoor Stadium, Sheikh Russell Swimming Pool, Divisional Women Sports Complex, Palichora Stadium and five 10-bed hospitals.

She would also be laying the foundation plaques of five projects, including the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre in Rangpur.

## Dengue patients keep pouring into DMCH

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Meanwhile, 2,584 more patients were hospitalised, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

So far, 54,416 dengue cases and 44,891 recoveries have been recorded this year.

**SALINE CRISIS IN CTG**

Dextrose saline, an essential fluid used to treat dengue, has remained largely unavailable in Chattogram for at least the past two week owing to an unwavering demand due to a rise in the number of patients.

As a result, hospitals in the port city have been struggling to treat dengue patients. Because of the supply crisis, they must purchase saline at two to three times the normal cost from the market -- with patients having to bear the additional cost.

Speaking to drug store owners, our Chattogram correspondent learned that only five companies produced and supplied dextrose normal saline (DNS) solution in the port city.

However, none of them has been supplying sufficient quantities to the market over the last month, citing a production shortage.

Dr Rezaul Karim, managing director of Parkview Hospital Ltd, said "We collect saline from four to five companies, but none of them can meet our demand nowadays. They can supply us with 10 to 12 litres of saline after we order 100 litres.

"As a result, we are facing difficulties while treating dengue patients -- even one without complications requires one litre per day. Critical patients may require up to three litres per hour."

Our correspondent found DNS solutions to be out of stock at pharmacies in Jamal Khan Road, Anderkilla, Chawkbazar, Bakalia, Panchlaish, Askar Dighir Par and Kazir Dewri areas.

Meanwhile, there were allegations that unscrupulous traders were stockpiling and selling saline at higher prices.

In this regard, the district administration and the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) conducted a joint drive at Hajari Goli, the largest wholesale market of medicines in Chattogram, on Tuesday.

Most traders fled the scene, closing their shops after being tipped off about the drive, during which 150 litres of DNS solution were seized from Bengal Pharmacy and Chattala Pharmacy. The seized saline was sold to hospitals at MRP.

"The saline was stocked with the intention of selling at a higher price," said Executive Magistrate Protik Dutta, who lead the mobile court.

Meanwhile, Samir Kumar Sikder, president of the Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists' Association in Chattogram district, denied the allegation of stockpiling.

"The drug stores couldn't stockpile saline solutions as they are not receiving supplies as per demand."

However, there was no shortage of DNS solutions in government hospitals.

Brig Gen Shamim Ahsan, director of Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said, "Government hospitals procure saline, like other necessary medications, through a tendering process, which obligate suppliers to provide larger stocks at once in order to avoid such crises."

## Five dead in clashes

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meant to move from one place to another but clashes broke out between two groups on the way, which resulted in the death of four people," Krishan Kumar, spokesperson of Nuh police, told Reuters.

He said two of the dead were members of the home guard, a voluntary force that helps police control civil disturbances. Another 60 people, including 10 police personnel, were injured in the clashes, local government officials said.

Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar urged citizens of his state to keep the peace, reports AFP. "The guilty will not be spared at any cost, strictest action will be taken against them," he said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, the ripples from Monday's communal clash in Nuh has reached Badshahpur, 40 km away. Restaurants and shops were vandalised and torched by a mob yesterday evening amid religious chants, reports NDTV.

Eyewitnesses said a mob of around

200 had entered the area around 4:00 pm, armed with sticks and stones. They vandalised several shops, including several meat shops, and set fire to a restaurant. No one was injured.

All educational institutions including schools, colleges, and coaching centres, remained closed in Gurugram yesterday. Board exams for Classes 10 and 12 were also postponed.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, India has seen numerous outbreaks of sectarian violence.

## Allowance for buying vehicles

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circular that was issued on Monday.

A maximum of Tk 1.45 crore could be shelled out for the 2,700cc sports utility vehicles that are provided to grade 1 and 2 officials. This includes the VAT and tax. The previous limit was Tk 94 lakh.

Grade 3 officials are also allowed SUVs of 2,000cc but their allowance is Tk 65 lakh, including registration fee, VAT and tax. Their previous allowance was Tk 57 lakh.

A maximum of Tk 52 lakh can be spent to acquire a microbus of 2,700cc, including registration fee,

VAT and tax, up from Tk 44 lakh before.

The allowance for ambulance was raised by Tk 10 lakh to Tk 54 lakh.

Similarly, the allowance for pickups, minibus and bus were also raised by Tk 6 to 10 lakh.

Motorcycles are largely manufactured locally and hence their allowance remained unchanged at Tk 1.4 lakh.

The government allocated Tk 6,551 crore this fiscal year for vehicle purchases.

Last fiscal year, Tk 8,880 crore was allocated for this end but was later

reduced to Tk 4,718 crore as part of the government's austerity measures.

On July 3, 2022, all government, semi-government and autonomous institutions were barred from purchasing vehicles, including ships and aircraft.

Although the order is still valid, vehicles older than 10 years can be replaced with prior permission from the finance ministry.

The increase in allowance is consistent with the existing market prices of the vehicle, said Md Shafiqul Islam, head of operations at HNS Automobiles.