



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

ESSAY

Rhymes, rebellion, and revolution

Any tool that has the capacity to unite is a threat to the powers that be. Reducing polarity, after all, allows people to recognise that their suffering is united by one common factor: the oppressor. More so, it is the methods employed by the oppressor that enable hip-hop to be used as a tool for resistance.

ABIR HOSSAIN

Movements leave an indelible mark on the psyche of the people, and thus, the culture. As people are pushed to the brink of intolerance through oppressive measures, fear eventually evaporates and the sentiments of the people are amplified causing seismic shifts in the zeitgeist. From its humble beginnings in the Bronx in New York City, hip-hop and rap have since transitioned into a global phenomenon. Its inception, however, is a tale of resistance and revolt. In recent times, the spirit of this tradition has been witnessed in Bangladesh during the July uprising.

Following a series of historic changes in legislation that empowered Black communities from the early '60s, the rate of progress they made eventually stagnated after the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This period saw economic and political inequalities widen with reduced investment in Black communities. But the Black Arts Movement was on the rise—seeking to reimagine and expand the horizons of art made by Black Americans. The trait that truly made hip-hop a tool for resistance, however, was its ability to gather people and reinforce a sense of community—one that was marred by the deficiencies of the system.

Any tool that has the capacity to unite is a threat to the powers that be. Reducing polarity, after all, allows people to recognise that their suffering is united by one common factor: the oppressor. More so, it is the methods employed by the oppressor that enable hip-hop to be used as a tool for resistance.

Hip-hop has the potential to shift and dismantle such perceptions, and the music that has come out as a result of the Quota Reform-turned-Students Against Discrimination Movement in Bangladesh sought to do precisely that. The songs reflect the outrage and aggression of the students who initially revolted against an unjust and discriminatory recruitment system and later, called for the fall of the regime. They also

commemorated the martyred.

"Kotha Ko" by SHEZAN begins with a high-pitched ring of the flute, evoking an ominous feeling. This short intro comes to an abrupt halt and is drowned by SHEZAN's abrasive delivery. His lyricism is rife with rage as he demands answers to confrontational questions. "Amar bhai-boin more rastay, tor cheshta koi re?" (My brothers and sisters are dying on the streets, where are your efforts [to stop it?]) and "Kalshaap dhorse gola pechay, bair kor shaaper matha ko?" (The black snake has us by the neck, find out where its head is). It is only in the former lyric that SHEZAN refers to the martyred students as his own brothers and sisters. In contrast, when speaking of the snake, he doesn't precisely point out whom it is choking. He doesn't let any one person or group become the victim. Instead, the phrasing insists that everyone is gasping for air. What he isn't subtle about though, is his contempt for the regime which he calls a black snake. The colour black, while synonymous with malice, is perhaps also a reference to the saree the former Prime Minister wore when addressing the nation on July 17.

However, it is the line "Raja johon projar jaan loi, jiga taile raja kaar?" (When the king kills his people, whom does the king belong to?) that resonated with me the most. It is framed as a basic question but the answers are jarring, and encapsulate all that is wrong with the former government. It is also worth noting that the line employs a double entendre through the last two words that sound a lot like Razakaar. It almost feels as though he is asking who the traitors really are. As the track progresses, the imagery becomes more scathing. SHEZAN references a blood-soaked Bangladeshi flag, goons gorging on the flesh of their own brothers, and the battering of the nation's backbone.

While "Kotha Ko" inquires, "Awaaz Utha" by Hannan commands. His delivery encapsulates the full spectrum of rapture that ran rampant

throughout the country. As he breaks into flow, the pain he feels is just as palpable as the anger. The track is a call for mobilisation, both of the people and the truth. Hannan shatters the lies that Sheikh Hasina and her party tried to push. Instead, he makes it clear that the students don't represent an agenda or a political party. They are here to stand in solidarity with their fallen comrades, no matter what it takes. He also juxtaposes the courage of the students with the cowardice of authority.

Throughout the fourth stanza of the verse, he grimly illustrates the greed that plagued the regime. The line "Amar boin re maira dili, tor ghorer ta marti tui?" (You killed my sister, would you kill your own?) is evocative. It is a reminder that such brutal and mindless violence would never be inflicted on any of them, as if their lives were of greater value. As a song of resistance, it shatters such notions by commemorating the students.

The journey of "Awaaz Utha" is poetic albeit greatly distressing. In the line, "Kotha hoile murdar deshe, nyayer awaaj tulbi ke?" (Speaking in the nation of dead men, why will you raise the voice of morality?), Hannan speaks of the suppression of justice. This is something the rapper himself fell prey to when he was arrested and placed in remand. He was later released along with all those unjustly arrested during the protests.

For the first time in years, artists have expressed themselves even in the face of adversity with little restraint. What enabled it was the infectious courage of the movement. "Kotha Ko" and "Awaaz Utha" are a testament to that. As history writes itself before our very eyes, these songs will aid in retelling it without any distortions. More importantly, it will serve to remind us that we must wield our tools of expression without fear.

Abir Hossain is a sub editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

POETRY

Look out the windows

SNATA BASU

In the blanks of muddy moonlight
two happy shards of kill
sing like feathers in a wound,
a child to a milking womb;
tonight there isn't a door that sleeps, and homes
close their blinds and draperies
in fear that there will be more fear; more nights
to hide
behind the barbed cables bulleting the sky
sprouting fire and filthy rain that's rotten to the
flesh.
Kneeling by the ledgers as the storm clouds gather
in between the umbrellas of bleeding soil and the
earth,
bare hands collar a handful of sand, picking up
weapons as deadly as the sea: a pen,
a screaming voice
a paper piece.
I want to be an eagle there
by the tombs freed immovable,
and cradle their carcasses,
rotting and orphaned by flickering street lamps
that glow low like spattered confetti, snow to the
angels
hovering by the floating dust. *Don't look out the
windows!*
You say,
but how can we keep still?
How can we keep at all,
from clawing out our hearts and laying it
by the songless limbs on the ground
smeared so cold
by the reaper's feeding hand, lost in time
forever
to the sounds of rising arms.

Snata Basu is a writer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her poetry has appeared on numerous literary platforms including The Opiate, Visual Verse: An Online Anthology of Art and Words, and Small World City.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

All hail July

AMARYLLIS

The July wind brought in the scent of new beginnings
With the end of summer break and a new term starting
What once began as a bright blue sky soon turned into a furious hailstorm
The black clouds threatening the incessant want to reform
The deafening sound of hail overtook the street
In hopes that soon enough, the masses will retreat
But there are ways to fight the hail
And people will continue to fight without fail
The hailstorm will soon start to clear
But the hails on the ground won't just disappear
The damage done by hails will continue to persist
Because hailstorms like this will never stop to exist
But we'll learn how to fight as we continue to grow
Just because July hailed on us, doesn't mean August won't be a better
tomorrow.

Amaryllis is an occasional contributor to Star Literature.

POETRY

Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh

For the students of Bangladesh

DILRUBA Z. ARA

Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh, I love
you.
Your brave hearts and your unified voice,
A distinctive bell that rocks the stars above.
Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh, your
beautiful minds,
Your daring footprints on the page of
history,
Echo the spirit of Abu Sayed—boundless
bravery.
Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh,
Your voice carries the outline of caged souls.
Freedom of speech: gagged mouths,
batons, and bullet rains.
Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh,
The souls of the martyrs walk with you,
assertive in death.
Your blood shines like fluid gold on the
streets of Bengal.
Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh,
Amidst mad dogs' barks and chase, you
walk with heads high.
Your unified voice for justice is a gigantic
cry.



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Magic boys and girls of Bangladesh,
Under the clouds of flame and fire, you are
ploughing
The dark land and sowing the seeds of a
bright future.
No boundaries can contain you; no dogs
can stop you.
You are the power, you are the designer,
you are the lighthouse
For future magic boys and girls of
Bangladesh. You are my Bangladesh!

Dilruba Z. Ara is the author of internationally acclaimed novels A List of Offences and Blame in addition to a collection of stories titled Detached Belonging. Her novels, stories, translated work, and poetry serve as touchstones for scholars worldwide while her visual art adds a multifaceted view into the depths of her creative soul. She is multilingual and adept in writing three languages, with her works published internationally. Currently residing in Sweden, Ara imparts her expertise in both Swedish and English.