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A few days ago I was in conversation with a medical team in Shonnyahar Char at Galbandha, serving the poverty stricken locals. The humanitarian team informed me about the struggle they had faced in their initial years concerning the provision of medical care to women. Despite diagnosis and treatment being free of cost, women were sometimes prohibited from availing these services. The reasons were varied. But mostly there was a perception that women are of no value, so why bother waste a 10km trek to the hospital for her? 'She'll get well if we ignore the symptom. Nothing's wrong with her.' The finding was saddening, but not surprising, given that the team was dealing with mostly uneducated people, unaware of rights and wrongs.

And perhaps the silver lining was the fact that these attitudes are slowly changing in rural areas, thanks to various NGOs and private sector investors who are dedicatedly creating awareness on the importance of good living. People convene at counselling sessions and amongst educational programmes on health; they are also exposed to social messages concerning health risks from early marriages, complimented with appeals to be humane and to treat daughters and daughters-in-law the same way.

It's worth musing that people coming in droves to attend such programmes, would take the message to heart. While not all would act accordingly, some might, while others would be coerced to conform to a certain extent due to social pressure. And that little change might mean prevention of a handful of child marriages and perhaps a few incidents of domestic violence as well. No incremental gain is too small!

# The ignorant educated

Now this is a chapter on the most rural of populations, those who are still grappling in the bottom rungs of Maslow's need hierarchy, concerned mostly about the most basic of needs. They travel a dozen kilometres on foot to attain medical care free of cost. When they borrow a seemingly insignificant amount of Tk. 300, they are not sure whether they will be able to pay that back. They don't know if their house will be standing if the next monsoon hits them with vengeance. They eat a bowl of rice if lucky, and fall asleep soon afterwards, as the moonbeams wash over the char.

Now let's fast forward and enter the happening world of urbanites where life doesn't stop till the middle of the night. Complaints about horrible traffic slowing life down are rampant. People worry about dust settling over and discolouring their designer shoes. Exorbitant medical care costs and apathetic doctors drive people to foreign countries. In between doctors' appointments in shopping destinations, they indulge in making purchases to flaunt in elite restaurants back home, which they frequent in chauffeur-driven cars, which get stranded in traffic, and oh my goodness, could someone please do something about the terrible traffic?!

Yes, life happens on a jet plane here as people, with roots in villages not unlike the one portrayed above, adopt western habits and adapt themselves at an incredible pace. Unfortunately, however, on this extraordinary journey of metamorphosis, while a fragment of their mindset evolves, the rest lags behind, travelling at a leisurely pace on an ox cart.

As an educator, I have had the opportunity to come across a few hundred unique individuals every year. Through them, I get an insight into typical households of many

families who dwell in the same city as I do, and probably subscribe to the same lifestyle as myself. Sadly, however, what I also see through their armour of education, western exposure, and modernism is that antiquated mindset smugly smirking away from atop the ox cart. Some of the brightest young women I have come across have expressed their frustration involving

under the conditions that she arrived home before he does every day. Married young women speak about in-laws intentionally hampering their education schedule, treating them like household help, and going so far as to even physically abusing them. "Perhaps she is not as educated as you", I had once volunteered to comfort a weeping student whose mother-in-law had intentionally

generation and continues to persist even today. Women, "products created for the amusement of men" - hard to believe, but I heard this from a PhD holder - should continue to be so. And if I am the 'alpha woman' of my clan (family, in the 'modern' concept), then I will continue to subject her to do my bidding, or so dictates the mindset. We, the educators, continue to

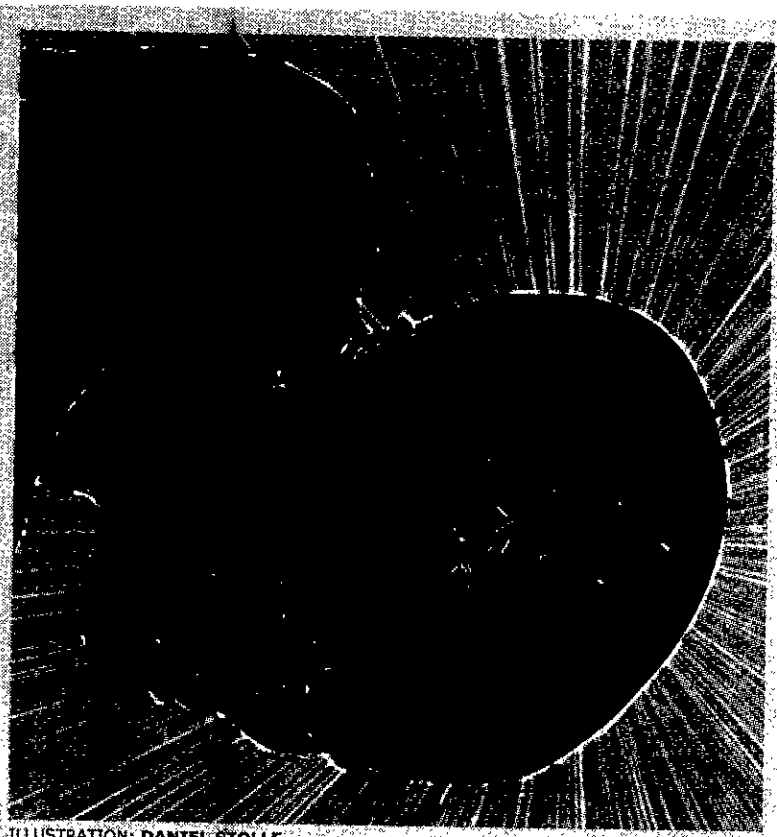


ILLUSTRATION: DANIEL STOLLE

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the journey to find a perfect groom. Well-versed with a Wall Street job, one 'gentleman' expressly told a particular young lady with a Bachelor's degree that she would under no circumstance be allowed to work after marriage. An NRB with a law degree from the United Kingdom, declared that the bride-to-be would be allowed to work only

knocked over scalding tea over her wrist. "Miss, she has a Masters in Chemistry", she said, as I stared, appalled!

So what is it really? It's definitely not the lack of education or academics bothering them. What is? I'm no anthropologist, but I can state that the archaic mindset of cavemen sailed through every

educate and take pride in creating a generation of nation builders. But what are we teaching really? A common topic of discussion amongst my co-workers is the paradigm shift in attitude that students have undergone. Fifteen years ago, as undergrads in a public institution, we hastened to collect ourselves in the presence of faculty members, whether

or not we were enrolled in their courses. Call this old-school, but I will defend this attitude as being courteous towards guardians away from home. A typical student today, in contrast, displays far more freedom in their demeanour which sometimes verges on rudeness.

And it's not their fault. The jet plane we are on has played a crucial role in breaking the barrier between the mentor and mentee, and that is, to a large extent, a good thing. There is more knowledge transfer, richer discussions, newer perspectives and better dynamics. But this education is remaining limited within an academic boundary. And that's where the problem is. By containing the education within an academic setting, we are educating students without really educating them (must I define the difference?). The misdemeanour is a symptom which in a few years is likely to culminate to, amongst other things, violence against household members.

As educators, we can help bring about a change. The monstrous women and men, hidden behind their accomplished degrees and happening social lives, will not stoop down from the upper rungs of Maslow's need hierarchy, to show up for any counselling session, unlike their rural counterparts. But as educators, we have access to a plenitude of youth. Side by side with the academic curricula, an extent of coaching, guidance, art of goodness, good living and empathy, could perhaps decrease the creation of dangerous alphas, hiding in broad daylight. The process will be excruciatingly slow. But it must start. Today.

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