



PHOTOS: SK ENAMUL HAQ, PRABIR DAS

Mountains they moved

ZUMA ISLAM AND NILIMA JAHAN

"I am building a new path for your child. Sowing seeds of courage. Your daughter will make those bloom into radiant flowers and your son will think it is absolutely normal."

This line from the performance poetry piece titled "Amra Agnijeetara" showcased on stage during the "Unsung

move mountains.

Laily is the only licensed female hilsa fisher in Barishal, venturing out to the river and sometimes into the high seas for days at a stretch.

"If this is not breaking the glass ceiling, then what is?" said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star at the event, held on Friday at Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden.

to primary school," said Sonu, speaking to The Daily Star.

"We would never disclose at school that we belong to the Dalit community. We know that people don't take us seriously and always make a mockery of our language [Hindi] and the profession of our parents. This is the most important reason for children dropping out."

OF STRUGGLE, OF CHANGE

Think back -- have you ever wasted a handful of rice? Perhaps it spilled out while transferring from bag to container? Or went down the sink while washing?

Kohinoor Begum did not ask for much from the people of her community in a remote village of Sirajganj. She asked for a fistful of rice each to create a food bank. The bank now has five maunds of rice saved and around Tk 45,000 in cash, unheard of in a poverty-stricken area frequently at the mercy of natural and climate change-induced disasters.

"I have struggled all my life for food. I have passed so many days when my family and I only ate kolmi shaak (wild watercress collected from the banks of ponds) because we did not find any relief during the floods," described Kohinoor.

"Their contribution is not an isolated event. The change that has come to Bangladesh is a story crafted by its women. It is the story of the 35 lakh women workers of our ready-made garment industry, the story of every household in our villages which are production powerhouses," said IPDC's CEO and Managing Director Mominul Islam.

This change is encapsulated by Joya Chakma, the first female FIFA referee from the country. "There was a time in 2006 when I had gone to

play at Kamalapur stadium for a girl's tournament, and we were not allowed to do so by radical fundamentalists. They surrounded the stadium and trapped us inside for around five hours. They kept saying that they would not allow girls to play in shorts with their legs showing," recounted Joya to The Daily Star.

That never stopped her from playing. A short documentary made about

Mohal Baby, for establishing a successful library in her village in Kurigram, a former enclave; birangana freedom fighters Tepri Rani and Biva Rani; Marjia Rabbani Shashi, the first blind female lawyer in Faridpur, and Kamrunnahar Munni, coach of the Tangail girls' football team.

Marjia, however, could not be present because her kidneys have failed and she is battling for her life at a hospital. Her mother Afroza Rabbani accepted the award on her behalf.

While all the other awardees may be dreaming of what to do with the Tk 2 lakh cheque they received, Shashi will be using it to pay for dialysis and live a few days more.

"The light of the eyes is nothing; the light of the mind is everything. But now the light of her life is going out. Save my little girl, my beautiful girl," said Afroza, addressing the crowd.

Marjia needs a kidney to live, and as her mother pointed out, it is still difficult to get voluntary kidney donations from a non-relative. The law permits only near relatives to donate kidneys; however, in December last year, the High Court has ordered an amendment within six months.

"My daughter is very talented, you cannot imagine. Her whole life was a struggle and she fought bravely," she told The Daily Star.

"My husband has gone. If I have to lose my daughter, for whom I have fought since giving birth to her, can you imagine how will I live? How will I fight?"

She reminds us, that for some women, the fight never ends.

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Similarly, how much effort does it take to finish your studies in a language that is not your mother-tongue? Just ask Sonu Rani Das, who became the first university graduate from the Dalit community in Tanbazar, Narayanganj.

"The average education level of my community is the primary level. And then too, a large number don't even go

Women Nation Builders Awards 2020", organised by The Daily Star and IPDC Finance, fully encapsulates what the awardees are doing.

Laily Begum may not quite be able to articulate the story of her journey with the eloquence of the poets on stage, but her very existence achieves what good poetry aims to do -- inspire, ignite fire,

