

RISING STARS

Enterprising Trio — The Disabled have Their Mettle to Prove

Hope is All They Have

by Rabeth Khan



Expressing a thought. Courtesy Kalyani

MONI, Ashraf and Russel are at an age, when they should have been experiencing the merry tastes of life. Instead they are all mentally retarded and lowly regarded by the society. Despite the fact that they are mentally retarded, they are all human beings like all of us and have all the rights to live in this world.

An organization named Kalyani situated in Malibagh, looks after children who are either physically or mentally retarded. According to the teachers, the children suffer from mental or physical retardation, cerebral palsy, Downward syndrome and other diseases which hampers the normal capacity of the brain to a great extent. When a child does not cry within five to ten seconds of birth; then the child is said to suffer from mental disorders. The parents of the children informed that, they accept their child as they are and love them with their heart's content. Only when they see normal children of the same age as their child, they feel a bit depressed.

Moni, Russel and Ashraf are the most active boys according to the teachers. Moni and Russel are both enterprising teenagers, while Ashraf is in his mid-twenties. They all have similar mental disorders and have problem speaking. Moni is a boy of sixteen, explained me how he spends a day. "I get up in the morning, wash myself and get ready for coming to my school." He is dropped off at Kalyani by his family members and is picked up at three in the afternoon. In the school, he attends vocational classes, cooking classes, carpentry, carpet-weaving and physical training. At home, he takes rest in the afternoon, completes his homework and helps out his family. He also watches television. The 'A' Team, an English movie shown on BTV is his favourite. Moni is a very good sportsman. He won prizes in long jump, athletics, and other events in the annual sports meet held recently.

Russel also in his teens is always jovial in school. Despite his problems in speaking he tries his best to convey his feelings to others. Other than his normal daily life, he loves to watch dramas and sports programmes in the TV.

Ashraf is twenty-six years old and is the oldest among the trio. A tall handsome and a soft-spoken boy, Ashraf loves carpentry besides regular studies. He is also a avid fan of Mohammedan Sporting Club and loves to play football. A conspicuous difference between Ashraf and the others is that, he comes to Kalyani in the morning and goes back home in the afternoon without the help of anyone. Sad but true, Ashraf has no father or mother and resides with his elder brother. The teachers fear that he might be completely retarded, mentally, due to constant psychological pressure put on him at home.

All the three boys have three things in common: They are all determined to succeed in their battle against existence, hopes to become doctors (which they never might be according to their teachers) and loves sports. Thanks to Kalyani, that they have got a new hope in their life. Mental disorder occurs due to late birth and the chances of complete recovery is very slim, in fact impossible. Kalyani hopes to make them self-reliant so that at least they do not have to depend on others for trivial matters in life.

All the three boys get a sum of money for work done on in a weekly basis. Their work is usually tailoring, carpentry and carpet-weaving. They are also penalised if they work less. This according to the teachers will help them in different steps of their life. They might not be able to fulfil their dream to be a doctor but establish their rights to live as ordinary human being. Good luck, and hope they win against their disease to become worthy citizens of life country.

Learning to cook. Courtesy Kalyani

My Sightless World

by Anjum Hossain

I live where visions are thoughts,
And what I see
Is true to only me and no one else.

I cannot see,
I admit that I am blind,
But I am not sad
For I live in another way.

I can feel the warm sunlight on my face,
And hear the birds chirping in the distance.
I can smell the beautiful flowers growing nearby,
And feel a single raindrop trickle down my face.

I can touch the soft feathers on a chick,
And feel the rough bark on a tree.
I can taste the juicy apples picked fresh and ripe,
And hear my mother sing softly in the night.

Though I am blind,
I do not care,
For I can live
In this sightless world of my own!

A physically handicapped man, suffering from Cerebral Palsy or motor disorder could never stand on his own or walk. He lays still in his bed, completely oblivious of the beautiful world around him, his eyes void of any emotion, as if staying alive or being dead mattered very little.

The best part of his story were his doctors though. They toiled day and night and worked out a magic potion. Within minutes of injecting this, his shell like body seemed charged, he could move, walk and stand without any help. His brain started functioning. For the first time he saw the sky without any assistance. But the sad part of his story was the temporary effect of the potion, after an hour his body would be just like the way it was before.

This is actually a few sequences described from the movie 'Awakenings', based on a true story. Actually, when you witness the annual school sports competition of the disabled children, you are definitely reminded of that magic potion.

Recently, while celebrating the World Disabled Day, Kalyani Bangladesh Probandi Foundation (BPF), held their annual sports. Little children running, playing and acting was a sight to remember forever. Rabbi, a boy hardly four years old could not stand on his own feet he had a motor disorder problem. Seeing him, take active part, obviously with his mothers help, in throwing a ball at the basket held by his teacher, one could not help but wonder about 'Awakenings'.

Every year Kalyani arranges such sports for their students. Music, dance, gymnastics, swimming are a part of their training and for the children

these activities are always fun. Rony, a little boy who took away most of the first prizes, would look absolutely normal in the eyes of ordinary person. He is actually a mentally disabled boy, his intelligent eyes betrays no such signs of being either physically or mentally handicapped.

Among many other games arranged for them, the most tricky ones, were to find choco-

lates hidden in flour, gather beads and perfectly colour circles drawn on art papers. These little ones, who are known as less able than others, very enthusiastically took part in all these events.

There was also a dress as you like show held after the sports. Babul, dressed like a doctor, looking at his watch, studied the pulse beat of Begum Sufia Kamal Chairperson of BPF. She acted weak and he acted like a strong doctor. There was a girl dressed like an old woman who walked with a cane and that too, with absolute perfection. With bent waist and

children born the same? This kind of disabilities or retardation has many causes. They include genetic problems lack of prenatal and post natal care, malnutrition, drug effects, high fever, low birth weight, not completing full immunization and above all, lack of knowledge and education.

The best way to deal with tragedy is to accept it boldly. A handicapped child cannot be left alone in his or her dark world, the parents should first of all love this child, and perhaps, more than his or her other siblings. A physically or mentally retarded child will

My Retarded Friend

by Shahreen Munir

showed that she did not take care of it. Her eyes were pleading but she looked abnormal. She was smiling at herself and after a while she started crying. Is she mad? I thought. As does she have a bad spirit in her? Ratri looked at me all of a sudden and smiled. I was pretty scared and therefore ran inside my room. I locked the door and plopped on my bed. A hugged my pillow and felt my heart skipping fast. 'Oh, my God! How come I never noticed this before?' I said when I saw that Ratri's bedroom could be seen from

mine and it had a window opposite to mine. I felt myself sweating, I was scared. Could she really have a bad spirit in her? Is that why her mother did not call her in front of us? Is that why she smiles and cries at the same time? All these questions gathered in my mind. Why did she have to be my neighbour? I said and pulled the curtains of that window. At lunch I told my mom about Ratri. She patted me and said 'I talked to her mother today. Ratri does not have any bad spirit in her, she is just...' she paused for a



November Rain

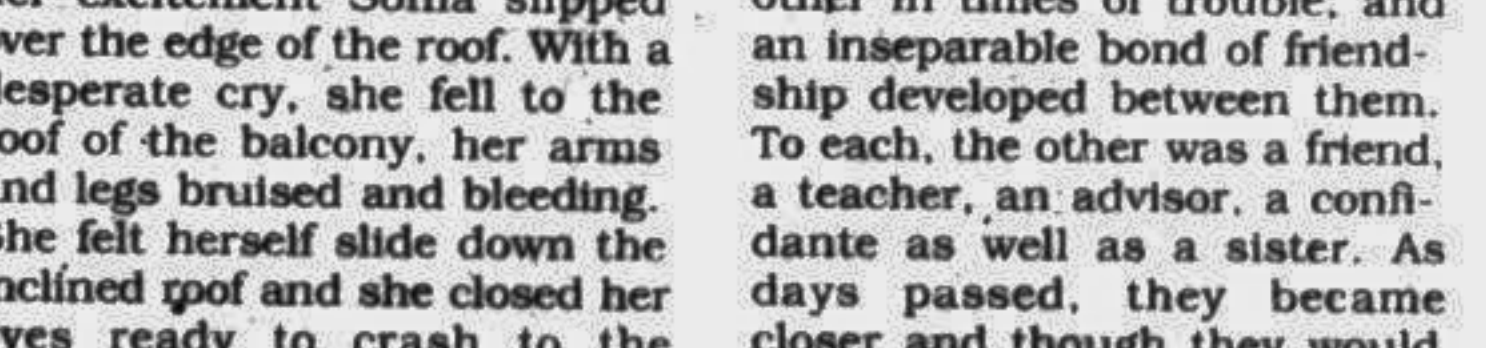
by Mahruba Sameen Hussain

gripped her arms tightly and herself heaved upwards and she reached the roof. She collapsed to oblivion.

When Sonia opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was Niki's anxious face. She was safe! Some marvellous miracle had snatched her from the jaws of death. If felt good to live again.

To her amazement, she was told that it was Niki who had saved her, the same Niki she had ignored all these days. She felt ashamed and angry at herself and resolved to be friendly with Niki.

From then on, the two girls became firm friends. They shared secrets, helped each other in times of trouble, and an inseparable bond of friendship developed between them. To each, the other was a friend, a teacher, an advisor, a confidante as well as a sister. As days passed, they became closer and though they would never part, but unknown to



never grow up to be a healthy and normal person. Educating the parents particularly the mother about how to handle her special child is our first job," said Shirin Zaman Munir the Principal of the school.

"Our cases are mostly referred from hospitals and clinics, and after screening, diagnostic and physical assessment we all sit with parents and chalk out the line of treatment and education," she said.

For the mentally disabled ones, Kalyani has separate programmes from that of the physically handicapped ones.

The groups are divided according to their age and each group is named after flowers. Komolokit is for the starters, from 4 to 8 years. In this group the concentration is on orientation with the mothers, how they will communicate and handle them at home, basic toilet training, feeding, dressing and other community living skills are taught here.

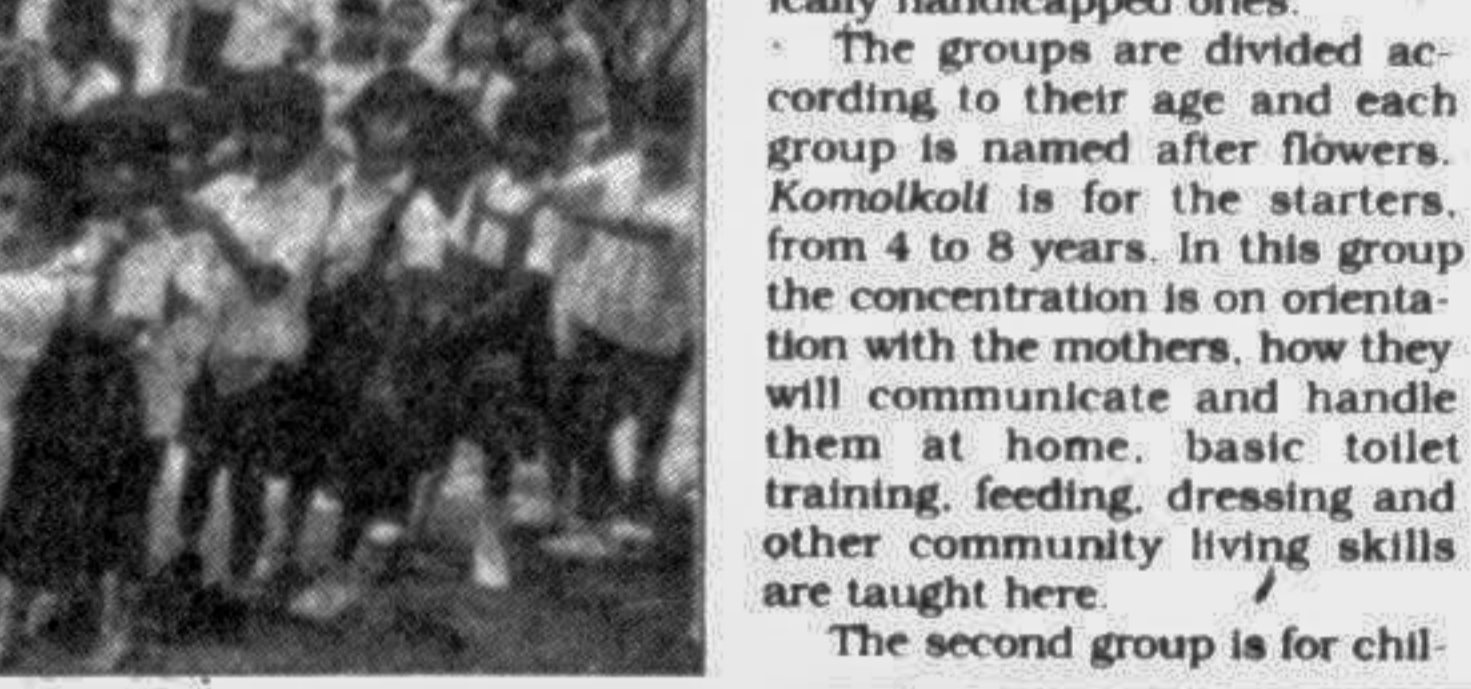
The second group is for chil-

dren aged between 9 to 13 years. This group is called Champokoli, here few academic functions are done. This includes teaching of basic arithmetic, which they will need to know for shopping and other practical purposes of life. Community living skills, like teaching, training, understanding are always part of the lessons.

Korobi, for 14 to 16 years children, basically teaches them survival skills and deals with their behavioural problems.

Madhobi is for students of 17 onwards. This is the final stage where they are given school certificates and are employed in Kalyani's sheltered workshop as craftsmen and labourers. Promotion from one stage to another solely depends on their age, and for other psychological reasons and not on how much they could learn and remember in the class rooms.

There are individual teaching groups and for each child individual lesson plan is made. Here the plan is chalked out and given to the parents too, since parents' participation is



The regular exercise. Courtesy Kalyani

very important and a must. After every six months this lesson plan is evaluated and reported.

Employees in the sheltered workshops also attend the Madhobi classes for one hour everyday otherwise, they tend to forget the basic living skills.

Dishari is for the physically handicapped children. It is divided into two groups and also has a mother and child programme. For patients outside Dhaka, there's a package programme. This is helping illiterate mothers and around 1300 children in 50 districts. This distant training package has pictorial guides which enables mothers to understand the needs of their children better. Besides this there is also a rural project in Dhamrai and a regular school for slum children and siblings of the disabled children. There is also an adult literacy programme for mothers, teaching them basic health and family planning.

Kalyani's most encouraging initiative is the sheltered workshop, here the workers are paid wages and are no longer students. They do crafts work, ceramic work, printing, weaving and needle work. They also do works on terracotta. There are skilled and non skilled workers employed there. Kalyani has a total of 125 students.

"Fathers are always out of the scene, this is my observation after being here for quite a long time, but this attitude should change, a father is very much a part of his normal child's life; his presence in his handicapped child's life is no less important," Shirin Zaman Munir felt.

Let us all pray and hope that Awakening's magic potion is soon found and all our little friends are helped in time.

Dwelling In The Dark

by Trishna

WHEN the green street lights turn red and the cars stop, we see many helpless and disabled persons begging. We get irritated by them more often and pretend not to hear, and ignore totally some of us get rid of them with cruel words and some take out a one taka note reluctantly, but only when there is no coin. Some are lame, some blind and some are born with unusual facial or physical structures, a bread or two a day, which they buy with their daily earnings, is probably all that they eat.

A beggar, unable to talk and with a hand without fingers, was earnestly waiting for some help beside a shiny Corolla. An old woman stays right opposite to my house. She must be in her late sixties and has lost her voice owing to some disease, which I really don't know of. Almost every evening, I hear her crying helplessly, sitting all alone in her balcony.

Indeed, right at this moment, when I'm writing this, I can hear her. I pity her from this distance but I guess her family has probably got tired of her, that they leave her alone without warm clothes in this winter. It seems to be her fault that she can't talk.

Children, today, grow up to be real bullies and especially when it comes to making fun

of the retarded ones. I agree, they are only kids and unable to distinguish between right and wrong but what about the parents? They seem to be more senseless than their children. If such an incident is occurring right in front of their eyes, all they do is move away the normal child from the abnormal one, as if the latter has a contagious disease. Then if we all step-back, who's going to save the unfortunate ones?

They have a world of their own — a dark world, where they light up dreams of being accepted and appreciated. It's a place where they build their fantasy of being active like us. There, in a world of sadness, they remain silent. And here we are, enjoying, with all the positive thoughts. You don't have to always stand by them, but at least when you see them, try and remember that you could've been one of them too. You may've been lucky so far, but just tomorrow a speeding truck or bus may run over your legs and make you disabled for life. Months later your daughter can give birth to a handicapped child and live with that burden forever. Paralysis can make you cripple. What would you do then? Would you like to be looked at yourself the same way you look at them?

Oh! Love

by Zinnia Ahmad

Dedicated to Shahed Latif

I had once taken a survey among my class friends with this interesting and complicated question. Reading the first line of your article last week tempted me to produce some of the results I received. So here is an account of these different definitions given by different personalities. Love is:

- * Painful
- * A dream which turns out to be a nightmare
- * Like a cigarette which burns and ends up in ashes.

1952

by Sohini Alam

Who can really share? The pains that we bear. Who will help us live? Through this struggling life. Some may use a knife, some may hide with fear; people killing people, is it possible to cheer? In the year of '52, Some students, at the enemy flew. They shouted 'Bangla', 'See us through, for do you not know, that we need you?' The shots, They rang out loud and clear; 'Ride on, Do not fear, We die with love, We do not hear, Of any but you, Whether far or near.'

feelings left her. She couldn't ever bear to look at Niki any more. Niki's last few days were excruciatingly painful as her health slowly deteriorated.

Sonia shuddered to think of those days. She had buried them deep within her, such painful memories better forgotten. Sonia had watched in agony her best friend slowly make her way towards death.

Finally on the thirteenth of November Niki died. It had been raining outside. A tear trickled down Sonia's cheek as she recounted that fateful day. There was too much pain, too much sadness. She had spent the past year mourning, building walls of isolation around herself. She did not want to live again — not without Niki. She had been left with a vast emptiness inside her. Even her parents seemed to have become strangers. They did not understand her.

With a sigh she went to the window and looked out. It was raining. She opened the front door and went out into the cold November Rain. — a lonely, solitary figure.

"Nothing lasts forever Not even cold November rain"

