

## Those who made a difference

### From bricks to walls

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

"One of our favourite pastimes was to gather with our friends on the rooftops and practise brotochari...with the daily laundry strung as 'tents' off course," my mother would tell us whenever women's movement came up in the conversation. Here they learnt the simple dance and songs which led the way to Bratachari Movement, initiated by Gurusudoi Dutta.

With so many forces barring women's freedom, this was the only acceptable compromise. Little did anyone know how these simple routines would slowly evolve and inspire women to emerge from their age-old confines. Dr. Nurun Nahar Fyzennessa (my mother), had been at the forefront of women's movement for over 50 years and I believed her when she said that the greatest changes could start from something seemingly insignificant.

The brotochari dance encouraged patriotism, secularism and most importantly physical and psychological fitness amongst the youth. Progressive families championed the spirit of education and culture even amongst girls. A handful of girls who were emboldened with such opportunities soon stepped into the world beyond their courtyard. This was the beginning and soon the time would come



Performing arts have had a profound impact on societal thought.

when that step would take women on to the stage of performing arts, in essence the very core of society.

The radio of course played a significant role. After the 1947 partition, the first radio station was on Nazimuddin Road in old Dhaka, the then city centre. Perhaps, out of sight of viewers, the radio was the most attractive channel for women to perform for the audience and yet maintain their privacy.

Vocalists Afsari Khanam, Anjali Mukherjee, Malika Perveen were joined by legendary voices of Feroza Begum and Laila Arjumand Banu. The golden era of music in erstwhile East Pakistan (during 1955-60) was led by

Ferdousi Begum, Anjuman Ara Begum, Mahbuba Rahman, Farida Yasmeen, Nina Hamid, Sanjida Khatun and Farida Bari Malik to name a few. After Liberation War, the momentum was nurtured by a host of talented artists from Sabina Yasmeen, Shahnaz Rahmatullah, Runa Laila, to Papaya Sarwar, Nilufar Yasmeen, Shabnam Mushtari, Rezwana Chowdhury, Farida Parveen and other reputed artistes.

The theatre world was not far behind. I often heard stories from my mother about how very few women initially joined the drama circle when she herself entered the scene along with Madhobi Chatterjee, Nomita

Anwar, Lilly Chowdhury, Biju Mustafa and much later Ayesha Khanam, Mirana Zaman and others. In films Sultana Zaman, Reshma, Sujata, Sumita Devi, Shabnam, Rosy and later Kabori, Babita, Shuchanda also joined gradually.

Then there was Khelaghar, an immensely popular radio programme aimed at nurturing the budding talents way back in the mid '60s. Shahnaz Rahmatullah, Sabina Yasmeen, Shaheen Samad, Sabiha Mahub, Abida Sultana and myself appeared almost every Sunday, then the weekly holiday. Children gathered from all around the city to sing or recite a few lines from poems. Dr. Fyzennessa initially conducted the programme and after a decade, Hena Kabir took over.

Over the years, some of the leading dancers to grace the stage were Rahiza Khanam, Laila Hasan, Sharmin Hasan, Dahlia Salauddin, Kajol Ibrahim, Lubna Marium, Zeenat Barkatullah, Shamim Ara Nipa, Mumun Ahmed and others.

The changing role of women progressed slowly from the makeshift tents on rooftops, to centre stage to public media -- growing from strength to strength. Change needs a face, and these spirited artistes leave a lasting image of the women's movement. Let us take a moment to honour women everywhere, not only as a part of today's agenda, but to treasure them as role models who inspire many.

### Rokeya Rafique: Becoming the voice of working class women

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Rokeya Rafique Baby is a force to be reckoned with. In addition to her role as executive director of the women's rights organisation 'Karmojibi Nari,' she is active on the cultural front as a prolific actor.

Rokeya took time off from her busy schedule to talk on a subject that's on everyone's mind -- International Women's Day. Excerpts from the interview:

"International Women's Day is a symbol of female existence and the need for our empowerment. Women should come forward to observe this day and put forward their demands. For instance, after 47 workers died in

a fire at a garment factory in Chittagong in 2006, Karmojibi Nari has been working on this issue as a participant in the Workers Safety Forum and has held dialogues with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Export Association (BGMEA). One of our achievements is that we have made female workers aware of their rights.

"On the cultural front, we face a sad scenario. Though there are many women in this field, they are not visible in the policymaking level. I firmly believe that in all mediums there should be female representation in authority. Also they could play a more diverse role in this sphere. One needs to look around to question why so few women are involved in light and set designs and direction. The real change will only come about when more women come forward."



Rokeya's organisation 'Karmojibi Nari' works to ensure the rights of working women.

### Women's contributions in Liberation War

#### Bipasha hosts TV show on Int'l Women's Day

NADIA SARWAT

Bipasha Hayat, the reflective actress, has carved a niche for herself in the Bangladeshi media on accord of her talent and beauty. As a performer she enjoys a charismatic fame; the epitome of her career was in the '90s. Through her convincing performances in many popular TV plays as well as in theatre, Bipasha became a face known and liked by everyone, young and old. However, she gradually reduced working in the media as she became more involved with family life. Nevertheless, her multifaceted talent was manifested through various mediums and it has been a pleasant surprise for her admirers to discover Bipasha as a writer, singer, painter and so on.

Recently, the artiste hosted a programme for ATN Bangla, titled "Kontho Joddha," which will be aired tonight at 9:20 pm on the occasion of International Women's Day. The Daily Star caught up with Bipasha.

"To me, the significance of observing a particular day for a purpose is a way of presenting the issue formally before the public. We celebrate Mother's Day or Valentine's Day on particular dates; it doesn't mean that we love our mother or dear ones only on those particular days. Similarly, we have to deal with women's issues everyday. So many seminars, symposiums and awareness generating programmes are held to improve the condition of women in our country. On March 8, the issue is specially



Bipasha hosts "Kontho Joddha." The show, to be aired tonight, features women who played significant roles in our Liberation War.

focused; I think it's important to recognise the rights of women formally," Bipasha said.

About the programme "Kontho Joddha," she said, "The programme was made keeping two things in mind, one is International Women's Day and the other, Independence Day. On the show, we invited women who played significant roles in our Liberation War."

Artiste Shaheen Samad, Dr. Naila Zaman, danseuse Sharmila Bandopadhyay and Sharmin Murshed are guests on the show.

"Crossing the border with the troupe 'Bangladesh Mukti Shangrami Shilpi Shangstha,' these women visited several refugee camps and inspired the refugees and freedom fighters with music. It's the subject that made me interested in the show."

Apart from hosting, Bipasha has also revealed herself as a poet, as she read her poem, titled "Nari O Nakshatra" on the show. Asked about the poem, the performer humbly refused the notion to be termed as a poet. "Well, I don't want to call that write up a 'poem.' I wrote it quite some time ago. When we were considering the intro, I recalled my write up, as thematically it matches the show," said the artiste. "Kontho Joddha" has been scripted by Aslam Shikdar and directed by Queen Rahman.

Bipasha recently performed a Rabindra Sangeet at the inauguration of the new satellite channel, Desh TV. She has also written a 26-episode drama serial, titled "Jal Pori," for the channel.

### Woman power votary

#### In conversation with Alieya Ferdowsi

KAVITA CHARANJI

Ferdous Ara Khanam (Alieya Ferdowsi) is an icon of woman power. The dynamo of energy dons multiple roles effortlessly -- as educationist, sports organiser, TV artiste, writer and drama director.

What's her view of International Women's Day? Alieya responds, "Women all over the world juggle many roles for the betterment of their families -- as employees, care givers, homemakers and close friendships. They are also politically aware. So I don't think that one day is sufficient recognition for women; everyday should be observed as women's day."

As for the progress of the women's movement, Alieya believes that signs are encouraging. Citing the case of rural women playing a major role in income generating activities and improved female literacy rates, she asserts, "Our women are becoming more vocal in every respect and successfully entering into a globalised world. With a proper platform, they can be effective catalysts for change among the future generation."

Alieya's is a powerful voice in Bangladesh. To her credit, she has acted in nearly 300 radio, TV and stage plays. In addition, she is also founder and guiding force of a drama group for children and adults, named Gharay Bairay. The group participated in the International Children Drama Festival held in Turkey in 1997.

As chairperson for the Radio Drama Artiste's Association, she has been the driving force behind a book comprising 15 radio plays, called Betar Natak Bibortaner Dhaka. The book includes a translation of Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca from English to Bangla. Alieya has also essayed a role and directed Tagore's stage

plays Natir Puja and Dak Ghar.

More offbeat is her premier role as a sports organiser. A former physical education teacher, she has many achievements on this front. She is International Olympic Council award winner for 2004, Asian Shooting Confederation Women Committee Member, joint secretary National Shooting Federation, and founder president of Bangladesh Women Sport Leaders' Association. In her capacity as a former general secretary of the pioneering Bengal Women Sports Federation, she developed training programmes for girls in swimming, chess, gymnastics, handball, volleyball and athletics all over the country.

Now she is eager to see the growth of women's cricket in Bangladesh. "If we can work at the grassroots level, we will certainly achieve our target -- with continued financial support from the Bangladesh Cricket Board," she says.

Yet women's sport, believes Alieya, has to contend with opposition from religious and social quarters. "My contention is that if women can work outside, then why not in sport? Along with physical fitness, they have the potential to be earning members of the family... Now we are working for awareness at all levels," she asserts.

One question that comes to mind is whether Alieya has faced obstacles in her numerous endeavours. She believes that she is fortunate to have had a supportive family environment and helpful male colleagues. However, there is a caveat: "Sometimes when women prove better workers than men, the latter become envious. If they can adopt a more supportive role, women can make rapid strides. My message: The world is not meant just for men, but for both sexes."



Alieya Ferdowsi is eager to see the growth of women's cricket in Bangladesh.

Through ages, your strength has been a contribution,  
you are an immense inspiration,  
you are greatness itself.

A tribute to women all over the world

POND'S

International Women's Day