

Although post-rehabilitation has been extremely difficult they are optimistic about the future. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

5th floors. They had started falling downstairs - there was rubble everywhere; it was all dark. Some lost consciousness. When they regained consciousness, they could not see anything, it was pitch black, they could feel bricks, and broken pieces of the buildings all around them.

Then there was a deathly silence. As they listened, while in pain, they heard people around them groaning. There wasn't much space to move around.

Some of the women had mobile phones and tried to call their near and dear ones for help and rescue. No one was able to help them under the debris. They were without food or water; time stood still.

After two or three days, they heard loud noises such as people trying to break through the rubble. After some time they saw a hole above, it became bigger, there was light, they could hear human voices. By now they had lost their feelings of hunger or thirst, all they felt was an overpowering exhaustion and weakness. Then some rescuers made their way through the pile of concrete and bricks, and pulled them out.

At present they are going through very difficult times. Their husbands are working as day labourers or rickshaw drivers. Earnings are limited, treatment costs for injuries and pregnancy are high. They need financial and psychological support. "Hopefully my husband will get a better job in another garments factory or elsewhere and in the future, I also hope to work in garments", one said.

It was difficult to listen to their stories; we were deeply touched. It was impossible to perceive and feel what they had gone through. However, as they were speaking, we could see that these young men and women had regained some of their strength, and though some of them were still going through medical treatment, they expressed a desire to start working again.

For most of the young women, it was their first baby. Only one of them said this would be her third child. We also met the husbands of some of these women. They had also been working in the Rana Plaza at the time of the collapse. They narrated their horrifying experiences of survival. Many were looking for new jobs. They received some assistance from people, but it would be a long struggle to pursue their lives. Most of the women came to Savar from far away places, such as Gofforgaon, Bhola, Meherpur, Satkhira, Manikganj etc. All of them were fairly young in their late 20's; their long lives still lay ahead.

We spent about an hour with them. It was a very moving and heart wrenching hour as we listened to the stories of these courageous survivors. It was hard to hold back our tears. Yet we could see their eyes sparkle with hope, and they were looking forward to having their children. As they spoke of their unborn babies, they had tears of joy in their eyes. They were determined to move forward with their lives. Their strength and resolution impressed us. The women asked for our prayers and support in their future path.

We parted with mixed feelings of sadness and happiness. We wish and pray that these women and their families stay well and keep moving on with their lives. Our thoughts and prayers will always be with them.

The writer is Managing Editor, The Daily Star.