

From left: Champa Chakma, Farzana Akhter, Joya Shikdar and Farjahan Rahman.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Courage, Thy Nam

UPASHANA SALAM

"Do you see that woman over there? She's divorced."

"What is the use of educating a girl? Help your mother in the kitchen, that's what will help you."

"She's living in an apartment all on her own. I am sure she's not of sound character."

A man's right to education, health, a better life is a given in our culture. It's the woman who has to struggle against all odds to live on her own terms in a society that has its fingers perpetually pointed towards her, its discerning eye watching out for any behaviour outside the "regular." A woman's place is in the house, it's her duty to worry about her family's honour, she needs to ensure that her husband and children come first. Her decisions are always taken for her, and when she attempts to do something for herself, she's castigated, and sometimes even ostracised from the society.

Even as majority of the women in our country are pressured into thinking that they are defined by their roles in their family, there are some courageous women who constantly fight against such gender clichés and stereotyping. One Billion Rising for Justice's 'Auddomo', organised at Shilpakala Academy on January 18, featured such women who defied societal definition of gender roles to emerge triumphant in their walk to empowerment.

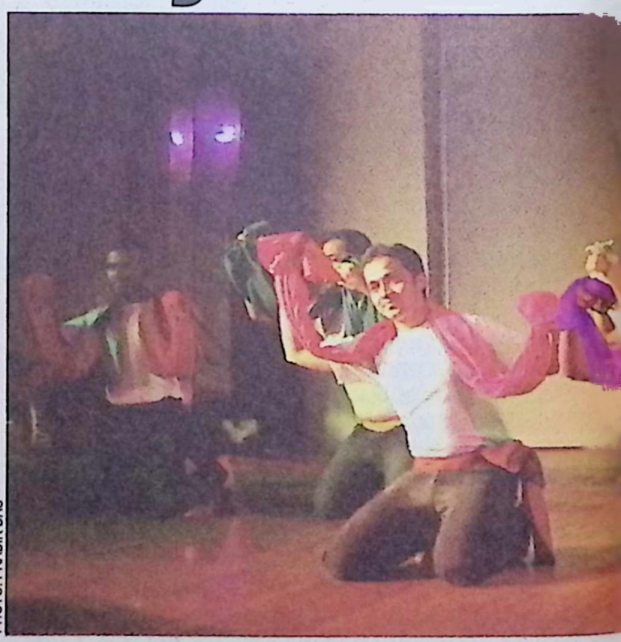


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Champa Chakma had always been interested in sports. But her passion for football and cricket would be dismissed by relatives and neighbours, who opined that sports was a field for boys. Champa says that she had to struggle to break free from the rules that denied her to indulge in her passion.