Health—You are Everything

Bangladesh's health care delivery system is broken and we need to fix it now. The question is how. To find answers, I approach Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, the warrior turned crusader of social development. The following is an account of what he believes needs to be done:

Trained as a general and vascular surgeon in United Kingdom from 1965-1971, Dr Zafrullah left the UK in 1971 to join the liberation war as a guerrilla fighter. Later on, along with other doctors, he set up Bangladesh Field Hospital, the first field hospital for freedom fighters and refugees, located in the border between Tripura State of India and the then East Pakistan. It was a make-shift 480-bed hospital run by 5 Bangladeshi doctors and large number of women volunteers who had no previous medical training. This experience led him to establish Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK), a multi-faceted community and development programme whose activities range from agricultural cooperatives, community schools, primary health care centres and hospitals, women's vocational training centres to economic enterprises.

The war gave him important lessons. The volunteers—young women who had fled from occupied Bangladesh— were given hands-on training to become surgical assistants, medicine dispensers, nurses as well as nursing aids. This experience of successfully training a paramedical force, both skilled and caring, in a few weeks, convinced him that it could be done on a bigger scale and that health care delivery need not be doctor centred. Many routine functions of doctors could be delegated to trained nurses and other health workers. For example, there is no reason to start sending all pregnant women to hospitals once labour starts. Trained mid-

Where No One Goes

Runa Khan is the Executive Director and founder of Friendship in Bangladesh—a value-based organisation, and also of Friendship International, currently operating in five countries. An internationally recognised speaker on social entrepreneurship, she has been a guest speaker at universities such as Insead, Cornell and The European Business School. She has received many awards, among them Ashoka, Schwab, IDB, and is the only Rolex Associate Laureate from Bangladesh. Also the country chair of Global Dignity, an organisation founded by the Crown Prince of Norway, she is a published author with eight books, six on pedagogy and two children's story books.

The way basic healthcare is provided to the poorest of the poor changed forever in the year 1994 when Yves Marre, a French sailor, sailed a barge from France to donate it to Bangladesh. Runa Khan founded Friendship and converted it into a floating hospital—an idea too radical even for NGOs to fund. Yves and Runa Khan managed to convince Unilever to fund the project. Friendship works in the most remote and inaccessible *chars* and riverbank areas of Gaibandha and Kurigram district in the North as well as the remote Coastal belt districts of the South. No one had helped these people before—they were too poor for everyone. Not for Runa Khan. She built schools for them, created jobs, built infrastructure to supply clean water, took care of them after cyclones, and gave them the most precious thing of all—dignity and hope. Friendship's fleet comprises of 3 ships, 14 boats, and 2 river ambulances and are equipped with separate units dedicated to ENT, dentistry, surgery, gynecology, pathology

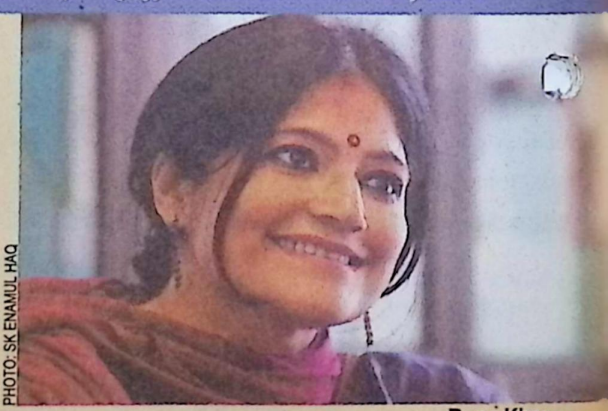


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Runa Khan