

E FOR EVE, E FOR EVE-SPIRATION

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PHOTO: COURTESY

One in every three women are abused in their lifetime. If one goes by the statistics that the world has a total of seven billion people, that will account to one billion being abused and that is by no means a small number. This was the root cause that gave birth to One Billion Rising (OBR). OBR is the brainchild of Eve Ensler, an activist, a playwright, a Tony Award winning performer, a victim of abuse, and a rape survivor. From 4-6 February, Eve Ensler along with her team was in Bangladesh on a tour to promote the works of OBR. OBR is the idea of one billion people all over the world rising up to end violence against women.

Eve gained popularity after the publishing of *The Vagina Monologues*, an episodic play depicting the lives and struggles that women face on a constant basis. The play was translated in 48 languages and performed in many parts of the world, including Bangladesh. She also started the movement called V-Day that raises funds for organisations that directly work with women. To date, the V-Day has raised over \$100 million and funded over 13,000 community-based anti-violence programs and safe houses in Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Kenya, Egypt, and Iraq, to name just a few countries.

So where does Eve derive her strength from? What has made Eve what she is today? For Eve, everything is about the body. It is about feeling, owning and living in one's body. Eve says, "You leave your body, power, imagination, when you come of it, but when you find your body,

you can come back to it all. When you dance, you come back". It is because dance has the power to unite the masses, to make everyone irrespective of gender and race come together, that dance is such an integral part of OBR.

That does not go to say that the OBR initiative has resulted in a world free from violence; infact Eve notices that while certain forms of violence are slowly diminishing, there are certain others that are on the rise. Eve further explains that all societies are guilty of patriarchy and violence is a methodology, a means of putting this theory in practice. She talks about "rapid impunity" in the way women's bodies are used and how politics, be it islamophobic, racist, capitalistic, or misogynistic gives rise to the destruction of women.

So, what's next in this regard, for Eve and more particularly for OBR? Needless to say, in her case the two go hand in hand. Eve talks about OBR and projects in the pipeline. OBR will be rising against crimes committed on black women, against minimum wage of restaurant workers, against refugee issues. In Atlanta, OBR will be rising against sex trafficking, of the inequality of economics. It will be rising at the rail station in Germany, in Hong Kong against domestic workers and in Japan in support of the comfort women. In Gambia, OBR actually rose against Female Genital Mutilation where the President has recently outlawed it. In Bangladesh, Eve met with Rana plaza victims to have focused group discussions.

But, Eve believes that men need to be



Eve Ensler

brought into this discussion that the battle cannot be women's alone. "It turns out we don't rape ourselves", says Eve. And that is reason enough to bring men in the equation, to make them feel like they are part of the problem. Eve is hopeful, and her hope is born partially out of the numbers of men she sees being part of OBR and its cause. Eve says that there are two schools of thought, one promoting fundamentalism and the other, liberation

and while both are extremes, and both have followers. But in the end, it's all about trying to revolutionise because the other option is push back and utter resistance. As she continues with her tour from one country to another, Eve, manages to inspire those along her way, some that take her visions forward and make small steps to achieve the ultimate dream: a world free from discrimination and violence. ■



WEEKENDS FOR FAMILIES AT THE BOI MELA

ELITA KARIM

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

One of the biggest and the oldest festivals is happening in Dhaka at the moment – the Ekushey Granthamela, and like every other February, book lovers have crowded the stalls looking for the latest publications. However, the fair is not only for the students to rummage through Zafar Iqbal science fictions after classes, for professionals to enjoy cups of tea after work and of course the artists looking for a place to discuss their latest innovations. For the last many years, the authorities have been dedicating weekend mornings for families and children.

The Boi Mela, on regular weekdays starts at 3 pm, winding up at around 8 pm at night. The weekend mornings however, are dedicated to families with children. From 11 am to 3 pm, families from all over the city come to buy books, take pictures, eat out or simply spend a day out with their children. From 3 pm, the regular crowd kicks in.

"It's strange! I have been visiting the Ekushey Boi Mela for years now and had no idea about the weekend family timing," says Tasmiah Alam Shikha, homemaker from Dhanmondi. "I went to the book fair last weekend with my 6-year-old daughter Neeha. I am very happy to say that we actually spent some quality time together. Neeha bought some colouring books, poetry books and children's fictions – she basically likes the pictures! The best part of the whole outing was that she enjoyed running from one stall to another sorting through books and turning pages."

Over the years, the crowds of book lovers have been growing and so has the space – the Boi Mela now covers the Bangla Academy area along with the Suhawardy Uddayan. However, many children, the elderly and families opt out of visiting the Boi Mela owing to the crowds, dust and of course the traffic. "I think it is simply not worth the visit all the way from Uttara, especially if you have work the next day and also the children have homework and school," says Tahsin Chowdhry, a lecturer at a private university in Uttara.

Shahid Islam Tushar is planning to take his family to the Boi Mela this weekend. "The children are very excited to visit the Boi Mela and have been waiting for the weekend this whole week. In fact I take them every year during weekends. This time, they had exams at school and were not allowed to visit the fair till last week." A home filled with children, Tushar describes a typical family day with his two children, two nephews and 1 niece. "The whole building becomes a playground and everyone is moving from one room to another. Since I have been given the responsibility to take the children to the book fair, I have been cutting deals with them the whole week so that they can behave and not run around like mad beings set free all of a sudden!"

"I bought comic books and a book by Zafar Iqbal. I am making a library for myself!" says 12-year-old Itrat Hossain, a student of Udayan School. "I want to have ice cream and then I will buy books," insists Itrat's sister,



4-year-old Shompa who managed to catch the ice cream logos at the food stall near by.

In a city where there are little or no access to entertainment for children, let alone activities to develop minds and personalities, the Boi Mela is actually a great platform for the young minds to mingle with others, think and choose between books and of course for parents and guardians to spend quality time with the young ones. ■

