

Kalpana Khudu? Kalpana Kothai? Where is Kalpana?

KABITA CHAKMA

KALPANA *ekhoni Kothai?* (Where is Kalpana now?) was an investigative article on the abduction of Kalpana Chakma by Shaheen Akhtar, now a renowned filmmaker and writer, published in the Bengali national daily *Bhorer Kagaj*, on July 17, 1996. Along with her friends, Akhtar embarked on an arduous journey, defying torrential rain, to Kalpana's home in remote Lallyaghona of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to investigate what really happened to her.

Akhtar's question—*Where is Kalpana now*—burns bright even today, as we mark the 20th anniversary of Kalpana's disappearance on June 12, 1996. Kalpana Chakma was the Organising Secretary of the Hill Women's Federation (HWF), an organisation of indigenous Jumma women of the CHT. Kalpana's abduction at gun-point from her home in the dark, early hours of June 12, was allegedly by a group of plain-clothed men from the military and the Village Defence Party led by Lt Ferdous Khan (17 East Bengal Regiment), as named in the first FIR (TDS November 24, 2013). He was then the commander of Kojochari army camp, situated near Kalpana's Lallyaghona home. Since that day, Kalpana has not been seen.

The abduction of this 23-year-old young political and human rights activist of CHT received wide national and international coverage. This was possible through the solidarity work of Bengali and CHT Jumma activists of Bangladesh. At one level, the demand for justice for Kalpana's abduction united all the activists in Bangladesh, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender and class. At another level, it united and solidified the women's rights movement in Bangladesh. A study of the two women's movements, Bengali and Jumma, of Bangladesh, in a forthcoming publication *Dissident Friendships: Feminism, Imperialism and Transnational Solidarity*, edited by Elora Halim Chowdhury and Liz Philipose, argues that "[t]he



20 years after her disappearance, the indigenous community still has many unanswered questions.

abduction of Kalpana awakened many Bengali women's rights and human rights activists in Bangladesh to the plight of indigenous women. Some Bengali women activists, risking the rainy season and the perils of the long journey, travelled to Kalpana's remote village to investigate the incident. They were instrumental in publicising Kalpana's abduction in the national media and breaking a long public silence about violence against women in the CHT. The tireless work of Bangladeshi activists, who continued to demand justice for Kalpana, also attracted international attention from human rights organisations and media, the Parliaments of Europe and Australia, and the agencies of the UN. In the wake of the campaign that year, NGOs and civil society organisations from 37 countries asked the Bangladesh government to rescue Kalpana immediately and conduct an inquiry into the incident.

Kalpna's brothers, Kalindi and Lal, were also abducted with Kalpana. But they managed to escape. They named three of the abductors, one from the Bangladesh military and two from the Village Defence Party, a paramilitary organisation. But a three-member commission set up to enquire about the abduction as well as the police failed to answer the question: Where is Kalpana? On September 7, 1996, under national and international pressure, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set up the above mentioned three-member Enquiry Commission that included Justice Abdul Jalil as chairperson, Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong, Shakhawat Hossain, and Professor of Chittagong University Anupam Sen. The commission submitted its investigation report to the Ministry of Home Affairs on February 27, 1997. The news of the submission of the report was only mentioned in Bangladeshi national dailies in March

1997. But the report, which absolved the military and the Village Defence Party of Kalpana's kidnapping and mentioned that "she had been abducted willingly or unwillingly", was never made available to the public, until an English daily obtained a copy in 2011—15 years after the abduction—and subsequently reported on it. By 2015, about 35 police officers had investigated the Kalpana disappearance case. In June 2014, it was reported that Amena Begum, the local Superintendent of Police, missed the 11th deadline for submitting any police investigation report of the case at CHT's court. At one of the 'umpteenth' hearings of the Kalpana Chakma abduction case in May 2015, a police investigation report of July 20, 2014 was presented. The report insists that since the victim herself was the witness of her case, no progress could be made until her return. For many, the police

report appeared to be evading dealing with the alleged perpetrators, one of who were in the military. 20 years on, the perpetrators of this heinous crime thereby continue to enjoy absolute impunity. I met Kalpana for the first and last time in mid January 1995, during the first national conference of the Hill Women's Federation (HWF) at Khagrachari, the beautiful northern town of the CHT. It was my first visit to Khagrachari, just as it was for my companion Mukti Saha from Dhaka, who was reporting the event for Pakhik Chinta, a feminist magazine. During my high school, college and university years, from the mid of 1970s and in 1980s, visiting any other part of CHT was unofficially prohibited during the ongoing undeclared CHT's agitation for autonomy. The visit to Khagrachari after my return from postgraduate studies abroad, meeting many activists, including Kalpana, and learning about their work and life was an eye opening experience. While the HWF conference was held on January 15, there was a lively open discussion on January 16. A woman full of life with a lovely smile on her lips, Kalpana brilliantly shined as an emerging leader at that conference. She listened, questioned, spoke and acted with full concentration, confidence and enthusiasm. Before her abduction, when I was in Dhaka and overseas, I received letters from Kalpana. I admired her for her courage, clarity in thinking, good leadership, friendliness, inquisitive mind, and also for her placid presence. A number of days before her abduction, she publicly argued with her alleged abductor Lt Ferdous. She claimed that Lt Ferdous was responsible for burning down seven houses and destroying a Buddhist temple in her village on March 19, 1996. Kalpana was also campaigning for an enquiry over the rape and murder of Shapna Rekha Chakma, a young girl who lived in her village. Her journal and letters, which were published in a 2001 book titled *Kalpna Chakmar Diary*, inform us of the injustices carried out in the CHT, which continue till date.

For 20 years, many voices from Bangladesh have raised the question of Kalpana's whereabouts. 'Kalpana's Warriors', portrayed in the exhibition work of photographer, artist and activist Shahidul Alam, are some of the people who have been fighting to ensure justice for her. Robin Ahsan, a young poet also raises the same question with his poem *Oi Pahare Julum Chole* (Torture in the Hills). Here the poet identifies himself as a friend and brother of paharis, inhabitants of the Hills, and demands an answer from the state on the whereabouts of his sister Kalpana. The poem reads: "...Sei pahari janaganer Bandhu ami bhai Kalpana Bon haralo koi Rastra jabbab chai." ("Kalpana Chakmar Diary", 2001) This foremost question of Akhtar, Ahsan and others is also the question for every Bangladeshi who dreams of a just Bangladesh, hard earned in the blood bathed *Muktijuddho*. In solidarity with millions of Bangladeshis, this demand, highlighted in the 20th year of Kalpana's disappearance, is now echoed in the Amnesty International's June 2016 campaign poster: **20 Years Disappeared - Still No Justice** *Where is Kalpana? #MyUnseenSister* In a sense, Kalpana Chakma is now a name of collective resistance against injustice and impunity in Bangladesh. By asking about Kalpana, we are also asking about what happened, for example, to Tonu, our sister, who was recently murdered in Comilla Cantonment area, as well as what happened to all of our 'lost' Bangladeshi sisters and brothers? By asking *Kalpna Khudu? Kalpana Kothai?* in Chakma, Bangla or any of the languages of Bangladesh, 'Where is Kalpana?' becomes the call for justice for all our unseen sisters, brothers and friends, while imagining a just, peaceful and diverse Bangladesh. The writer is a human rights activist.

Cultivating your own garden



SHIFTING IMAGES
MILIA ALI

DURING my recent visit to Sicily, a chance meeting with a pavement vendor selling hats and belts left me in a reflective mood. Since the man appeared to be Bengali (Italy has a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants), I stopped to ask him for directions and soon we got talking. After he confirmed my origin, he stated that he had worked as a server in the Jahangirnagar University canteen before making his way to Italy. The encounter made me effusive, since I had been a teacher in the same university at one time. I handed him a €20 bill to show my solidarity, but he was unwilling to accept charity and handed me two belts. His pride and rectitude confirmed what our guide in Palermo had told us: "In Italy Bangladeshis are universally liked for their integrity and diligence." That the Bangladeshi vendor demonstrated an exceptional dignity filled me with a sense of pride about a compatriot. But the positive feeling was overtaken by regret. Why is it that during my tenure as a teacher in the university I had been so snobbish that I had never thought of passing the time of day with someone on the other side of the rusty metal counter? Let me confess that as a raw teacher, I had donned the garb of someone above the hoi polloi...as if the academia bestowed this right on its teaching

staff! But why focus on the academia? Snobbery and discrimination are an integral part of our social norm. Each time I go back to Bangladesh, I am offered unsolicited advice on how to manage the domestic help. The conversation usually starts with a caveat: "Since you are not used to full time help in the United States you tend to overindulge them - distance yourself from them and maintain an occupational relationship or they will walk all over you." I have to acknowledge that the years of living away from my country of birth have substantively changed my attitude toward the so-called "lower social strata". Despite all the well-meaning counselling, I end up investing a sufficient amount of time talking to the help about their personal situation - something that I never did in my younger days. I find myself having these casual conversations while sharing mundane household tasks with them. The richness and depth of their personal stories have taught me a great deal about the trials and tribulations of the common folk. The married women abandoned by their husbands who toil to feed and educate their children, the single women whose fathers are unable to provide for them because they are disabled, or have too many mouths to feed - all have their own tragic tales to narrate. These heart wrenching stories not only stir my conscience, but also make me count my numerous blessings. I seem to have digressed from my original narrative about the Bangladeshi I met in Italy. My short interchange with this exuberant

immigrant made me aware that in my young teaching years, I never made an effort to get to know the people who helped keep the university grounds clean or served tea in the lounge. They mostly operated as invisible beings. I was too preoccupied with my career and high ideals. But today, having taken many twists and turns in life, I was struck by this man's aspiration to change his life from a tea boy to something that would give him a greater identity and a better life! The brief interaction also triggered a natural question in my mind. How do Bangladeshis, who are generally considered "lazy" and "untrustworthy" in their country, transform into hardworking and honest individuals in Italy? Is it the environment, is it motivation, or is it something more organic in the nature of man? I began to reflect on Voltaire's *Candide* in search of a possible explanation. In this satirical novel, Voltaire challenges the prevalent idea propagated by the philosophers of the time: "Everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds", and people perceive imperfections only because they do not understand God's grand plan. The protagonist, Candide, after a long journey of suffering and witnessing a wide range of horrors and injustices, discovers a farmer who claims that simple work keeps him from the three great evils: "Boredom, vice and poverty". Candide is deeply moved by these words, and decides that his prime duty in this world is to "cultivate the garden", since this will give him purpose, peace and a productive life,

leaving no time for philosophical speculation. Is it possible that these Bangladeshi immigrants in Italy have discovered their "patch of garden", and are hoping to reap the fruits of their labour with dignity? No longer weighed down by the adverse circumstances of their birth, they may have found their emancipation through hard work that offers rewards and satisfaction. In their own modest way they have gained a degree of control over their destinies! The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com.

KATALYST
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Request for Proposals

Katalyst is a market development project that aims to contribute to increasing the income of poor women and men in rural areas of Bangladesh. It does this by facilitating changes in services, inputs and product markets, which in turn increases the competitiveness of farmers and small enterprises. Katalyst is co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the UK Government, and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). It is implemented by Swisscontact under the umbrella of the Ministry of Commerce.

Katalyst desires to enter into a **framework service contract** with an eligible research organization for **assessing impact of interventions implemented by Katalyst**.

The aim of the assignment is to conduct impact assessments of interventions carried out by Katalyst. The objectives of the assignment are as follows:

- To assess the level of impact, in terms of number of beneficiaries and increased income of beneficiaries due to the interventions rolled out by the project.
- To undertake the Assignment based on guidelines provided by Katalyst MRM Manual.

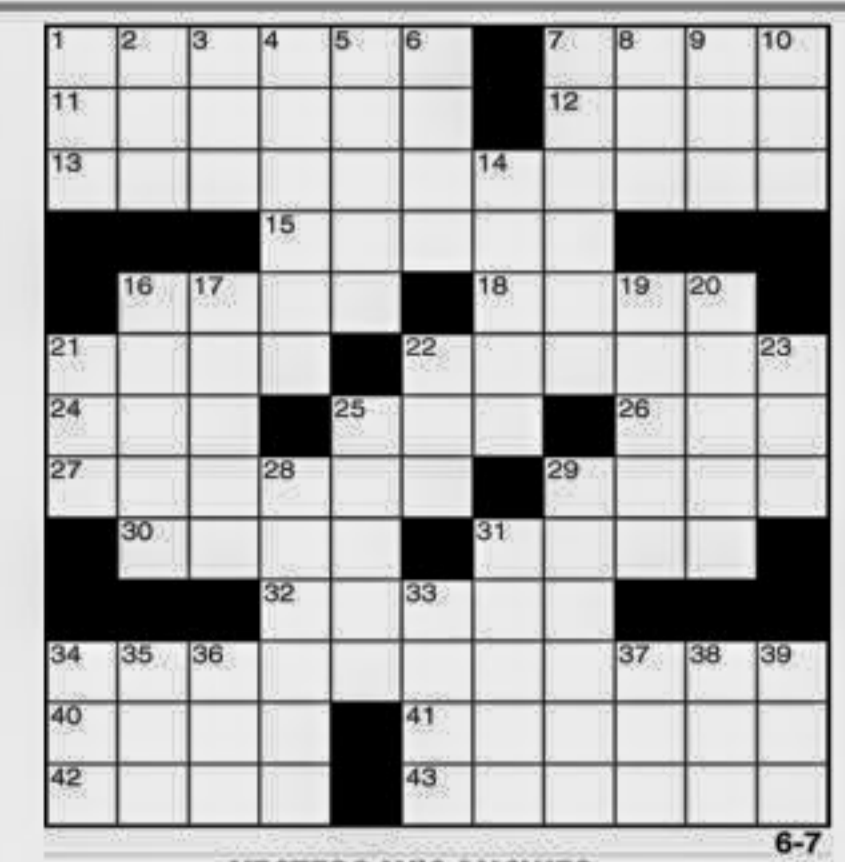
Details regarding the Request for Proposals and the templates for submitting the proposals are available at: <http://katalyst.com.bd/procurement-of-services/>

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 - Game caller
 - Pole worker
 - Campaign backer
 - Hawke of Hollywood
 - Clarinet part
 - Winner
 - "This--test"
 - Building wing
 - Tiny
 - Wedding words
 - Common dice roll
 - Mob revolt
 - Floppy caps
 - Plus
 - Hot dog holder
 - Suffer
 - Tycoon Howard
 - Hunted animal
 - Jury member
 - Bother
 - Book of maps
 - Insanely exciting
 - Part to play
 - Plaster finish
 - Abacus piece
 - Hot spot for songs
- DOWN**
- Old hand
 - Opposite of oui



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

ALIBI FADED
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STARS REVEL
NUTS ANT
PHASEOUT
LAUD TRUSTY
ELTON ERNIE
DOOWOP NORA
NO ANSWER
FIB DYED
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