



PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

SONU RANI DAS: FIRST GRADUATE AMONGST DALIT COMMUNITY

SHARMIN JOYA

We are apprised of the sufferings and hardships of women in our society. While there is an add-on to those who belong to the minority, for them the roads to success are always bedded with thorns. Sonu Rani Das belongs to one such group. She, beyond all the odds and downs, managed to achieve a commendable goal. She is the first graduate amongst the Dalit community in Tanbazar, Narayanganj. Sonu was born and brought up in the Narayanganj sweeper colony, often being neglected.

"Like all other people in my community I was not very aware of the power of education, but my elder brother was the one who had always inspired me," asserts Sonu. "He is the one, who at times being rude and with kind words made me realise that only education can enlighten our lives and help develop our community, though he himself did not study after the eighth grade."

Sonu got married at an early age. However, she was lucky to have a supportive and understanding life-partner who always stood by her. She completed her Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), majoring in Management, and got admission in a post-graduate programme, following the birth of her son. She took a break and now wishes to complete her masters soon.

"I was brought up in an environment where people are marginalised to the extreme by partly religious sanctions and partly by social and economic deprivations; we get very limited opportunity when it comes to labour or lifestyle," expresses Sonu. "Having a low percentage of educated people around is a basic cause for leaving our dreams behind."

Sonu worked in Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) which works for the rights of the respected community. Expressing her gratitude towards the organisation, Sonu also feels

sad that she had to leave the job during her maternity period and it has become tough for her to continue as it is far away from her home.

"I am currently giving tuitions to the students here in Narayanganj, especially to our people. Many of my primary students are already married and also having children at a very early age," mentions Sonu. "Child marriage is an epidemic problem and I feel that if people start receiving knowledge through education, they will overcome this."

Language is a great barrier for the Dalits as they communicate mostly in Hindi, but the academic curriculum is in Bangla. Many feel stuck because of the language. Sonu wishes to work on the communication gaps and she urges the children to continue their education and not drop out in the primary levels.

"I want my community to understand my achievement. People around me

congratulate me only because I was featured on television or my photo was printed in the newspaper," says the determined Sonu. "Sadly, no one understands the reason. They do not even understand what graduation is. This is heart-wrenching. I am very passionate about making these people realise that only education can bring positive changes, both socially and economically."

Sonu's endeavour of chasing her dreams will come true if she can convince the community to support her. She dreams to diminish the problems she has faced while growing up, so that her children and the future generations do not suffer in the same way.

Being an inspiration to all out there who are deprived, Sonu has the confidence and courage to move ahead. She has created history, being the first graduate in her community, and she believes that she can bring about many more positive changes.

Ali Hasib's aspirations through the lens

MINAM HAQ

Born to parents who are already established in their respective fields in media, it is no surprise that Ali Hasib nurtured similar dreams. His mother, Shamima Shammi is a director as well as a writer for television, while his father, Mohammad Ali Bashir is a television producer and owner of Telehome, a renowned production house.

Upon completing school in Dhaka, Ali moved to the USA to pursue higher studies. He graduated as a student of Marketing from Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts. "I have always had a passion for film and photography," expresses Ali. "I often tend to observe the world through the lens of my camera, capturing the moments that intrigue me. That's how it became a hobby."

He began experimenting with documentaries, through his project, *Dhaka: A City of Possibilities?*,

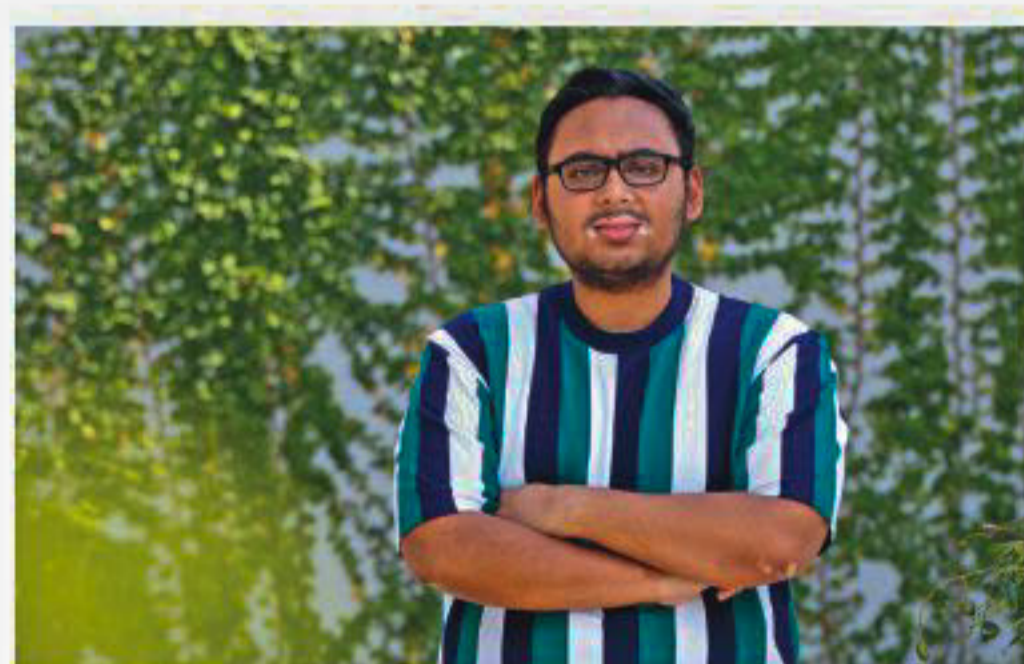


PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

where he embarked on a journey with a youth based organisation Footsteps, to seek opinions from the citizens and celebrities on how to improve the living conditions in Dhaka. Ali later worked on *Abar Ashbo Firey*, another documentary focusing on how, despite many

young people leaving Dhaka, the city still manages to sustain itself, whilst maintaining its potential.

"After moving to Boston around 2015, I was fortunate enough to work as a photographer and videographer with multiple musicians, including Zara Larsson and Ty Dolla \$ign," informs an enthusiastic Ali. "While completing a semester in Los Angeles, California, I was able to work for a campaign with JCPenney as a cinematographer as part of the production."

Whenever Ali would return to Bangladesh on vacation, he would collaborate with local brands here to shoot for their content. He is also keen to shoot travelogues. The young and aspiring talent wants to continue working in the USA to enhance his skills and earn more experience in the field. However, Ali plans to return to his homeland in the future, to make a meaningful impact on the entertainment and fashion industry in Bangladesh.



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

UNESCO WHV 2019 – Let's Heritage at Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, India

World Heritage Volunteers (WHV) 2019 – Empowering the Commitment to World Heritage. The WHV 2019 campaign provides empowering and enriching opportunities to young people and enables them to go beyond borders in some of the most outstanding places in the world. Volunteers will work together to preserve natural and cultural sites, as well as to raise awareness among local communities about their heritage.

DEADLINE: August 5, 2019 | Exchange Program

International Youth Math Challenge 2019 (Win cash prizes and certificates)

The Qualification Round 2019 of the International Youth Math Challenge has opened for submissions. Use your math skills and your creativity to qualify for the global final round to win great prizes and certificates!

DEADLINE: September 29, 2019 | Competition

Fall Internship Opportunity 2019 in bKash

The Internship Program is designed to identify and hire the most potential candidates to create our next generation of leaders by harnessing and developing their talents.

DEADLINE: August 11, 2019 | Internship

