Sonu Rani Das, *The first graduate among the Dalit community*

She is one such woman who despite all the odds, achieved the distinction of being the first graduate among the Dalit community living in the sweeper colony of Tanbazar in Narayanganj.

She got married at an early age. But she was lucky to have a supportive and understanding life-partner who always stood by her.

After completing her BBA, Sonu has now gotten admitted to a master's programme.

"I was brought up in an environment where people are marginalised to the extreme partly by religious sanctions and partly by social and economic deprivations," she says.

According to Sonu, language is a barrier as they communicate mainly in Hindi whereas the academic curriculum is in Bangla. She says many are held back by language. Other problems facing the Dalit community include, of course, child marriage.

Sonu, an icon amongst women of the community, wishes to work on raising awareness to overcome these barriers. Children in the community are now following in her footsteps.

Along with studying, Sonu works in Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and in a project under the Narayanganj City Corporation to improve women and children's health.

As part of the recognition of her struggles and achievements, Sonu got the opportunity to participate in various international programmes in Scotland, Switzerland, and Brazil.

Being an inspiration to others who came from underprivileged backgrounds, Sonu has the confidence and courage to move ahead. She has created history in being the first graduate in her community, and she believes that she can bring about many more positive changes.

Sonu dreams of diminishing the problems she faced while growing up – so that her children and future generations do not suffer in the same way.

Kohinoor Begum, *A social leader of poor villagers*

Borangile village lies on the char land of the Jamuna basin; villagers are mostly dependent on finding work as day labourers to survive. They are able to grow some crops when the water in the river recedes and the char lands are exposed.

Situated around 100 kilometres from Sirajganj town, Borangile often falls out of the purview of government amenities or relief, even though its people are among those critically affected by flood and other natural disasters.

Early in 2018, a few women including Kohinoor Begum, going to collect relief materials from the local government, had to walk a distance which took a couple of hours by foot.

They were turned away as relatives of the local member-chairman had got the relief items instead of them. At least 3,000 families in her union were gravely affected by the floods that year.

Taking matters into her own hands, Kohinoor called a meeting in her village – gathering around 40 women to help set up a community food bank for times of need.

The community is itself poor, but there are some who are needier than the others, Kohinoor said. "We should do something for them. During hard times, any member can take rice from our bank."

Set up in 2018, the food bank is independent of government support. "We are trying to gather financial support from other villagers as donations," she said.

The food bank also works as a crisis fund for the poor – used to meet wedding expenses of poor families, treatment costs, and educational costs.

Members of this food bank also started setting aside whatever little they could manage. It now has 48 members and their savings have crossed Tk 40,000.

The initiative and its founder are now a source of inspiration for neighbouring villages.

Kohinoor has suffered extreme poverty since childhood.

She is now mother to four daughters and three sons. To feed their children, she and her husband worked together as house maid and day labourer in their neighbours' houses.

Joya Chakma, *A revolutionary figure in football*

While other girls ran after university degrees, "better" careers, and a secure future, a girl hailing from the hill district Rangamati devoted herself to football.

Her struggles, devotion, and hard work have afforded her the privilege of being the country's first female international referee recognised by FIFA, the world football governing body.

Joya Chakma is the only Bangladeshi among five FIFA-enlisted female international referees in South Asia.

As a child, Joya used to compete in sports and run races in her childhood, but loved football the most.

Her outstanding performance in an inter-district football tournament in Dhaka, where Rangamati won, earned her a call up to play in the women's national football team. She went on to play in various national and international tournaments including the SA Games in 2010.

Joya then got admitted to the history department at Jahangirnagar University. But she was already garnering hopes of being a football referee.

"I was in a dilemma about whether I should start studying for a job or work towards building a career in football," said Joya.

She then decided to sit for an examination for referring.

Her career as a football referee started in 2012 through the Bangamata football tournament. Joya went on to referee matches in football tournaments in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tajikistan. In 2015, Joya refereed 10 football matches in an international football tournament in Berlin, Germany.

Joya joined Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) as coach; under her guidance, the BKSP women's football team became champions in the "Subroto Mukherjee Gold Cup" tournament in India where she also received the "best coach" award.