



#SPORTS

HUMAIRA AKHTER ANTARA A Karateka's journey

Humaira Akhter Antara is not a name you'd hear and easily forget — especially if you live and breathe the air of Dhaka, a city that seems to never rest, much like Humaira herself. She has come a long way since her days as a Madrasa student, navigating the intricate social web of a city that has dreams tucked away in every corner.

Today, this gold medallist in Karate from the 2019 South Asian Games is readying herself for the upcoming Asian Games in China. But her story is not just a tale of kicks, strikes, and breaking bricks with her hand like in the movies; it's a story of defying norms, of smashing through glass ceilings, and most importantly — rising against the overwhelming tides that society throws at us.

"Dhaka taught me that nothing comes easy, but it also taught me that nothing is impossible," says Humaira. Raised as a Madrasa student until the seventh grade, she faced significant pressure from her parents, who wished for her to settle into a traditional role. But Humaira wanted 'more out of life,' a sentiment that echoes in the heart of anyone who dares to dream bigger

than one's status, financial capabilities, and the seemingly eternal struggle to stay afloat.

"Don't expect me to be safe just covering myself in a veil," she argued with her parents, as she negotiated her entrance into the world of Karate in 2013. How could a fabric protect her when her spirit was restless, she thought. Her uniform, the Karategi, wasn't just a piece of cloth; it was her armour, her identity, and her defiance, all rolled into one. "It transforms me into a warrior," Humaira insists, with the raw aura of a fighter enveloping her.

"He supports me as my coach and as my family member, whereas many do not even get to work outside after marriage. That is invaluable to me," shares Humaira, echoing a sentiment that can resonate with many women in Dhaka, confined by patriarchal norms. Her husband, disciplined in the art of Karate himself, fuels her ambition rather than extinguishing it — a beacon for what marriage in our society can and should be.

Mohammad Jashim Uddin, the National Karate Coach, with 38 years of experience, saw more than just a student in Humaira. Under his mentorship, the Bangladesh Ansar Karate team has won seven times, and he believes Humaira to be an example for all women, despite their social status or age. "We all need to support each other for a better future. Thanks to Karate, the discipline will prepare you to face the future regardless of age or gender," he asserts.

Antara's credentials include an incredible face-off against a Moroccan opponent, where she lost by a margin of just one point. Far from a defeat, this narrow gap gave her wings, making her confident of her ability to bring further glory to Bangladesh. "Dhaka teaches you that every failure is a stepping stone, and that every struggle is your tutor," she observes, mirroring the ethos of our daily hardships.

"No incident comes knocking at your door; you have to be prepared," she asserts, underscoring the need for women and young girls in Bangladesh to take their safety into their own hands. "Karate is a sport of honesty and discipline. We all need these qualities in life," she concludes, giving

a clarion call to all young women who aspire to break the mould.

As Humaira prepares for the grand Asian Games stage, she carries the hopes and dreams of every struggling soul fighting their own battles every day. Each kick, each strike, and each bow will not just be her own but the collective effort of a country that dreams big, despite its challenges.

Humaira Akhter Antara is not just a champion Karate; she is the living embodiment of an indomitable spirit. Her story is a mirror reflecting the triumphs and challenges of life, which is a constant negotiation between tradition and ambition. And so, as she steps onto the grand Asian stage, we recognise that her fight is our fight, her dream is our dream, and her journey from the dusty by-lanes of Dhaka to the world stage, is our journey too. Humaira's life story is an anthem for the everyday fighter and an inspiration to us all — a reminder that no matter where we come from, the horizons are endless, as long as we dare to look beyond.

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In Frame: Humaira Akhter Antara

