



#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

TRAILBLAZING BANGLADESHI WOMEN

reach new heights in mountaineering

In a world where women are still fighting for equal recognition in various spheres, five Bangladeshi mountaineers have shown that the spirit of resilience and determination knows no bounds. With the theme "Sultana's Dream Unbound," inspired by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's ground-breaking feminist utopia, these women recently returned from a historic expedition in Nepal.

Led by Nishat Mazumder, the first Bangladeshi woman to conquer Mount Everest, the team proved that the dreams of trailblazing women like Begum Rokeya are as relevant today as they were over a century ago. She was joined by Arpita Devnath, Mousumi Akter, Tahura Sultana Rekha, and Yasmin Lisa, each bringing unique strengths and stories to the table.

The challenges

Mountaineering is not just a sport but a way of life for Nishat Mazumder,

who sees it as a metaphor for overcoming life's struggles.

She explained, "I feel a spiritual connection with mountains and nature. Life itself is a challenge, and mountaineering is one of the most challenging pursuits. Traversing the rugged paths of a mountain often makes navigating the rough paths of life feel a little easier. It is an extreme sport, filled with risks to life. It demands persistent dedication over a long period. This makes it particularly challenging for women. Yet, it is vital to remain steadfast and patient in the face of these difficulties."

Even in Nepal, the team faced societal misconceptions.



Yasmin Lisa, one of the team members, recounted an incident: "When we went to Nepal, there was a woman who asked me how we would get married. She assumed that if we didn't marry young, we'd have to 'settle' for less. I replied, 'So what if I don't get married? I would climb mountains all my life.'"

Lisa's journey to the Himalayas was deeply personal.

"In 2018, I first visited the Himalayas and completed a basic mountaineering course in India. That's when I fell in love with mountains," she said.

However, financial constraints often made it difficult to pursue her passion.

"Thanks to the mountaineering association, Abhijatri, five of us were able to take on this expedition. It was truly a life-altering experience.

Everyone should get to experience this once in a lifetime."

Addressing gender gaps in outdoor sports

One of the key challenges the team encountered was the lack of female representation in mountaineering, even in countries like Nepal.

"For this expedition in the Nepal Himalayas, we needed female guides to lead the way. However, even there, the number of female mountaineers is alarmingly low," Mazumder pointed out.

This gap highlighted the importance of initiatives like Team Sultana's Dream, which aims to empower women in outdoor sports.

Mazumder emphasised the need for systemic change: "Over the next five years, Team Sultana's Dream will continue its efforts. Every year, we will train more women in mountaineering and organise winter expeditions."

The team's collaboration with UNESCO and MasterCard demonstrated the power of collective efforts in breaking barriers.

A symbol of hope and empowerment
Beyond the physical challenges, the expedition carried immense symbolic value. It showed that women could not only excel in a male-dominated field but also inspire broader societal change.

"Begum Rokeya's masterpiece, Sultana's Dream envisioned a world where women could thrive without societal constraints. This expedition was our way of making that vision a reality," said Mazumder.

The expedition was more than a singular achievement; it was the start of a larger movement. Mazumder and her team are committed to creating opportunities for the next generation of female climbers. Through training programmes, mentorship, and expeditions they aim to foster a culture where women feel empowered to explore their potential.

In the words of Yasmin Lisa, "Mountains teach us resilience, patience, and strength. This experience has been transformative, not just for us but for everyone who believes in the power of dreams."

The success of Team Sultana's Dream opens new doors for Bangladeshi women in outdoor sports and advocacy. These five women have sent a powerful message: the dreams of Begum Rokeya are alive, unbound, and reaching new heights.

By Aymen Anika
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