Chain
of
Poverty
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Introductory text:
I woke suddenly from a bad dream, shaking, sweating. It was 4am in Brisbane and midnight in Dhaka. I wanted to know that Mali and Jairina Khala were okay. I hadn’t called them for a long time after I left them a few months back. I dialled the number, fingers shaking, body shaking. Finally, Khala answered. I felt instant relief, they are alright. Jairina Khala is not really my Khala (aunt), but we are like an extended family now. Mali is mentally and physically disabled and living with her single mother, Jairina Khala on the street outside Kamalapur Railway Station, Dhaka, Bangladesh. They wait for morning, hoping the new day might free them from this life.

For two and a half years I have been exploring the lived experience of three impoverished families in Bangladesh. They are Jairina Khala’s family who are city street dwellers, Bellal Bhai’s family who are rural villagers, and Nurjahan Khala’s family who live in a slum. I have immersed myself into their situations, living with them, engaging with them and becoming a stakeholder in their daily lives.

The World Bank stated that while poverty reduction in Bangladesh has occurred, the overall number of people living below the poverty line remains significant. Poverty is accepted as a social institution, which sustains the unfair distribution of wealth in the global society. As a result it is difficult or simply impossible for people to break the chain of their own impoverishment.

Through collaborative storytelling, I seek to give voice back to these families and close the gap between ‘them’ and ‘us’. The aim is to recognise impoverished people as multidimensional and change the ways in which audiences understand their lives and communities. In attempting to do so, intimate relationships have been formed and the compassion among us can never be broken.
There's no life on the street

Living on the streets they wait for another morning everyday, believing the new day might free them from this life.

The life of Marla Khala, 45, a single mother and her daughter Mai, 14, live on the street at Kamalapur Railway Station. The life started for Marla Khala in 1996 after she was displaced from her own family and has been living on the street for more than 18 years and for Mai the life started even before she was born on the street.

Now Chaya collects garbage to earn a living about $10 a month but she used to do what ever she can, including beg. She got married to Bhander, a railway porter when she was a teenager but he left her after she gave birth to her third child. Among the three children, Malik is the only child who survived, John, the eldest son died at the age of 8 or 9 and Mai's twin sister died at her 21 days from pneumonia.

Marla's early days was delighted with mother but when she was about seven Khala noticed that she was mentally and physically disabled. Until last year Khala along with other neighbour strongly believed that the bad evil who lived with Mai is the reason for her illness. Mai has to claim her daughter to a fence everyday by her uncle from dawn to dusk every day since then. Despite evidence of Mai's mental and physical disability, she has never been diagnosed. In November 2011 she underwent an electroencephalogram (EEG) in order to determine the cause of illness and medication. Mai suffers from epilepsy and she is lucky if Khala is nearby when she has a seizure. Other times, she has sustained injuries from falling when no one is around. As soon as Mai been diagnosed we started her long-term medication and it seems now she is getting better.
One day, everyday:

The days are meaningless, especially for both of them, particularly for Ada, who lives within 50 square meters. It is every moment of her life she passes, passing and going to pass. This particular 24-hour day captured is a series of 96 moments in every 21 minutes pass, started on 3rd November 2012 and finished on 6th November 2013. Barre Khade and I hope she would and/or will have ‘another life’ when she can able to have the freedom of life.
We are poor because we were born into a poor family

I went fishing with Belpal Bhai numerous times. On January 2, 2013, after a long day we were able to catch 81 shrimp fins and sold them (0.70). We were lucky enough to catch a 0.12 kg Bajaj fish for his family. He has to go to Sundarban (the world’s biggest mangrove forest), to fish and collect firewood where he risks being killed by man-eating Bengal tigers. He mainly catches shrimp fins and sells them for a living. His income varies depending on how much he catches. Some days he does not catch anything. His income varies between $0.21 and $4.00 per day, depending on how much he catches. Some days he does not catch anything.

Belpal Bhai, 36, Nurunahar Bhabi, 25, and their daughter Nikita, 6, live in Katalaj village in Khulna in the southwest of Bangladesh. Nurunahar Bhabi sometimes works as a domestic helper.
The dreams
Dark Nights

From 12th - 16th December 2015 Billal Ilahi had no money to buy kerosene for his lamp, so they spent the week using the light from an mobile phone. - December 2015.
Najihan Khali, with her husband Ali Hossain Khali, three children and two grandchildren share a 2.1m x 3.7m room in a three-room shanty. Five of the family members work for their living: Ali Hossain Khali (pulling a rickshaw/lorry labourer), Nurjahan Khali (housemaid), their daughter Sabina and Kokilana (garment worker) and son Shahabuddin (factory worker).