



Our Planet

Asma walked down to the river, a tub on her head, Fatima on her hip. Her **salwar kameez** flapped in the wind, her **orna** slipping from her head. She pulled the orna up and knelt to look at her land, or more aptly described as her husband's land; there was writing on a small headstone, which she was unable to read. Being illiterate didn't make her life any easier, but then again, all she had to do was cook and clean. Fatima squirmed, giggling and squealing at the sight of a fish in the River Meghna. The river was flowing, clear enough for Asma to see the fish, murky enough to put her off collecting water from it. Fatima leapt down from her mother's arms, pulling at Asma's orna; Asma ignored her, walking forwards to the land beside her house. Her house was right by the riverside, and she watched as Fatima scrambled up the embankment to get away from the fish in Asma's hands. Asma flapped the fish at her daughter, pretending the fish was still alive.

"Amma!" Fatima screamed in her high-pitched voice. It was the one word her daughter knew, and Asma would never tire of hearing it.

"Be careful, babu!" Asma said back.

She fed the chickens, cooked, cleaned, all the while listening to Fatima's squeals of delight as she ran around the village chasing stray cats and dogs. Life was easy, and after gaining **independence**, life wasn't too eventful in Bangladesh. Living by the river made Asma's job so much easier – water was never running out, and the land was fertile and soft.

25 Years Later:

Fatima walked down to the river, a tub on her head, Mishti on her hip. Her *salwar kameez* flapped in the wind, her *orna* flapping around her neck. She turned around to see the land she stood on, her land, and the land of her family before that. She read the Bengali script on the stone, which read,

"Shared ownership of this land of 2 hectares. Owned by Farouk Chowdhury. Bought in 1972."

Mishti squirmed, looking at the constant flow of plastic bottles and ice cream wrappers, mistaking them for marine life and fish. She wriggled down, splashing in the water of the **River Meghna**, unaware of the plastic that occasionally scratched a part of her leg or her arm. Fatima

looked at her daughter with a mixture of pride and yet an underlying sense of sadness; when she was a child, there had been fish in the now murky, unattractive waters of the river. Now she looked longingly at the river, as though fixating it with a look of anger and reliving memories of her childhood could somehow make the fish swim back to the river. She was brought back to the present by the shrieks of Mishti, who had seen yet another “fish”; Fatima sighed and wondered when the planet would stop deceiving her daughter, robbing her of her joy and passion for seeing fish. Mishti scrambled up the embankment, squealing with delight as she slowly became covered in mud, letting it engulf her. Fatima walked back to their house, Mishti following close behind her, when a loud scream erupted from out of nowhere.

“My house! My house!” wailed Asma, trying to collect the water which had flooded their house in a bucket as though it would help.

This wasn't new to Fatima; her house had recently been flooded a few times over the past few years; it had only started happening recently, and it was almost as though it had started overnight. Fatima was sure that when she was younger her mother had never had to deal with flooded houses and earthquakes; living by the river made Fatima's life so much more difficult. Sometimes she couldn't help but think whether her grandfather had ever thought about flooding when he had built the house directly next to a river, or whether the flooding hadn't been as bad then.

“Fatima, why are you just standing there? My house, my Qur'an, my things!” Asma shrieked, Mishti splashing in the water, seemingly unaware of her grandmother's distress.

“Amma, calm down, it's nothing we haven't been through before,” said Fatima soothingly, trying to convince herself more than her mother (who was at a point beyond comforting).

Together, they tried to salvage what they could. Mother and daughter worked together, gripped with an overwhelming sadness at losing their home, the only home they had ever known, the only home Fatima would ever know as her own.

“What is my fate, Allah? Why has the planet chosen to cheat me out of my own home? Was I not good enough to you, my lord? Was I ever good enough?” Asma cried out.

Mishti fell silent, her chubby hands caught in a small piece of plastic.

“Fish? Amma, is it a fish?” she said quietly, fiddling with the bits of plastic which had filled their area, washing up on their shores, drifting on their lakes.

“No, babu, not a fish, not today,” Fatima replied, removing the plastic from her daughter's wrists, stopping herself from adding “never”. What had her planet, the one she and the generations before her had known, come to?

Orna: a scarf worn with a lot of clothing in Bangladesh, used for modesty purposes, used as a head covering and (more recently) around the neck

Salwar kameez: a traditional type of clothing worn by women in most of South Asia

Independence: (in Bangladesh) 26 March 1971 is Independence Day for Bangladesh when it separated from Pakistan (it had previously been called East Pakistan).

Arwa K

Year 8



Croydon High School

for girls aged 3-18

GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST