

## Hide

Here I am born in Cox's bazar. As beautiful as the place is where I am born at, my life wasn't. I have lead my life with duality and complexity initially, like those sea shores where I pretend to be the beach, and my heart of fondness, the sea, touches me, but soon leaves away because it has to.

My name was Zia. My parents accounted me to always wear pants and shirt and play with the boys out the field. Whenever we had to encounter a social greeting, I always had to face those eyes of my mother glaring at me only to be not physically acting tender in manners. Mother always tried hard to keep me and my identity secret and my father always looked at me in shame.

As I grew, my very classmates made fun of me because they used to think I acted feminine. In fact, I liked what the girls around me used to do and sometimes even wanted to be like them. Bullies and cat-calling was my everyday hearing. One day, one of the boys from my school even pulled down my trousers...

Going through puberty was the hardest.

When I was 12, once my parents went out of the house, and I was alone at home. My heart and eyes only looked at my mother's almira, only to give them a try once. With great courage, I opened the almira, looked at those sarees and little what cosmetics she had. I put on my favourite saree of her's, a little powder and kajal, and finally, I put a common red shade upon my lips.

God.

I felt so alive, and so myself. Have I ever felt this bliss, I don't remember. But little did I know this happiness wasn't forever.

Bam.

My parents shoot in.

I was slapped, slanged, beat down to the floor with my dreams to be 'me' shattered, lying. It felt worser than being in class and being called names by others. Somehow from that day I lost what little care I had in my life. I had no one to confide to and no one to trust. Can I ever find a place where I can be my true self? Do I have to be afraid all my life like this? Can my wish come true?

My parents soon died after. And I was left alone. I was already alone, this was no surprise. Though, I stayed in wander. Did physical work in exchange so I could keep something in my stomach. Somehow I got noticed by the Hijras in the community. They invited me to perform with them. I didn't ever have a choice of my own but who knows what will come. I joined with them.

Slowly I became more familiar with them. As I grew I changed my name to Riya Moni, not Zia.

16 years later, I owned a fabric store. But my fight wasn't over yet. Months later, there came an arson attack upon my store. And this was not the first time my property has

been damaged. Other owners disliked me being around them. Even some customers enter my shop, see me and turn to exist. I couldn't give up easily. I restarted my business. But due to the competitions around, my business ebbed slowly.

I soon happened to find a gender based violence protection program - DRC. I unhesitatingly became a member of this profound group and started getting psychosocial support from them.

People like me, we all gather in that safe space twice a week for recreational activities held by the program. The little space that I wished for, it came true, for at least some hours a week. I feel welcomed and comfortable for who we are there.

I am Riya Moni. I was born in Cox's Bazar, and am an intersex born person. I am beautiful. And I have the same capacity as any other human being. I deserve, like any other human being to live as a human being.

Although Bangladesh has acknowledged Hijras as the 'third gender' and is certainly a developing change, but there are many other Hijras who didn't yet find a place where they can live safely with social acceptance, or find a community who could provide their basic needs.

Maybe one day, the intersex people in our country don't have to wait for programs to serve them a safe place. Maybe one day, everyone will accept us, and let us live like the others...

*PS. This story is true and partially added fiction to it.*