

## THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

*Below is the English Translation of the preface to Aamaar Shastha, Aamaar Satta, the Bengali adaptation of Our Bodies, Ourselves, published in 2009.*

When discussing women's lives and their mental and physical well being, one needs to take a close look at their social status. A scrutiny from this perspective would lead us to an examination of women's rights, rights that would allow women to live like human beings in society. Unfortunately, women have to struggle to make a claim to those 'human' rights.

In ancient India, a woman did not have her own identity. Women could only express their opinions in restricted domains of living. Their voices were mainly unheard and remained neglected outside of these areas. A woman did not possess the right to articulate her personality in most spheres of life. To choose her own partner, to express her likes and dislikes were considered immoral and a serious social transgression. Women were chattels of society. Marriage allowed the transfer of their ownership from the natal to the marital family. They were sex-providing machines; their existence was tolerated for their ability to bear sons... If women ever asserted their choices, they had to pay for it by being labeled as 'fallen', 'corrupt', and 'wicked'. When they were victims of intimate violence, others looked down upon them; even their loved ones refused to take responsibility for their safety. The same traditions are still evident.

Now, society has passed some laws for women's well being. These are the harvest of women's own labor. Women of some sectors of society have also become economically independent. Even then, they still have to keep their own wishes invisible, hidden. Even now they have to deny their own bodies and sexualities to be deemed 'good girls'. Families and society still do not consider women's education, work, and health as priorities in life. Women's worth is marked only by their beauty, which is assessed by traditional standards.

Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta is designed to deliver real life information about women's bodies, sexualities, and health to them. We have attempted to focus on women's mental and physical well being to help individual women become strong and healthy.

Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta is a translation/adaptation of Our Bodies, Ourselves (OBOS), a key book on women's health and sexuality that was published in the United States of America in 1970. OBOS is now in its 35th anniversary edition. The book has been translated/adapted in different countries and in various languages all across the globe. Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta is based on only two chapters of OBOS - Taking Care of Ourselves, and Sexual Health. We have adapted the information to Bangali culture and society to make it our own. We hope Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta will encourage girls and women to learn about their own bodies, take care of themselves, and not hesitate to ask questions when they need help.

Many women's efforts have made Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta possible. Its Advisory Committee has served an important role in its publication. Our deepest gratitude goes to Kuhu Das, Bharati Bandopadhyaya, Sutapa Dewanji, Sughagata Ghosh, Nupur Sanyal, and Ehsanur Rahman of Bangladesh. Many others helped in the preliminary phase of Aamaar Shaashthya, Aamaar Satta. We are grateful to

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