



RACIST



FREEDOM OF SPEECH



QUARANTINE

Each set of words by Banglay Boli is based on a relevant issue.

ILLUSTRATIONS: COURTESY OF BANGLAY BOLI



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## YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

### Youth Opportunities Campus Ambassador Program 2021

Youth Opportunities is launching the 3rd season of its Campus Ambassador Program for the aspiring youth of Bangladesh. The program aims at empowering the youth as changemakers in their institutions to promote different aspects of global and local opportunities among their fellow students so that they can avail of these opportunities and transform them into successes. DEADLINE: November 20, 2020 | Volunteer Service



# Learning Bangla collaboratively through art

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

Banglay Boli is a collaborative project by Humairah Shams, Omiya Hassan and maliha mohsin. "We have been friends for years and have worked together on several collaborative art and storytelling projects," says maliha, who spells her name in small letters.

Omiya is a graduate student from the University of Missouri, Columbia, USA. She is also an illustrator, a designer, and the founder of the art store, MiyaBhai. Humairah is an illustrator, a designer, a calligrapher, and the founder of the art boutique, Made With Love. maliha is a writer, researcher, DJ, and community organiser, with a focus on queer-feminist political intersections in the arts. She also focuses on the use of arts as a community practice.

The three friends started Banglay Boli as a collective learning process. They were all raised as predominantly English-speaking, and they believe that it is important to be able to communicate in Bangla to have constructive and critical conversations with their immediate communities, especially about matters of social and political importance. "We have often found that we don't know the appropriate vocabulary for many conversations in Bangla," explains maliha. "We have all recurrently tried to reconnect to the

language and learn it. But the pandemic has been a big transitional period for all of us, in terms of acknowledging socio-political issues. We have also come across various projects on the internet made by and for Bengali people to translate, and communicate political campaigns in Bangla within their communities. It is important for us to acknowledge these sources of inspiration, when we talk about our own motivation."

The resources that served as their inspiration reached them on Instagram, as all of them actively learn from independent artists and community organisers who use Instagram as a medium to disseminate essential information, news, and knowledge visually. Since Humairah and Omiya are artists, they knew from the beginning that this was going to be a visual project. "Instagram is a very easy and approachable platform for a visual portfolio. Although we could have a broader audience on Facebook, we realise that reach has become increasingly limited on Facebook for those who do not boost their posts," explains Omiya.

They work on a set of three words at a time. Each set is based upon a relevant issue, and they select keywords that they find are most frequently used when the issue is discussed. "When Black Lives Matter reached its peak on social media

and the news, we found that some of the most relevant keywords were 'racist' and 'discrimination'," adds Omiya. "We work together to select the words and appropriate translations and usage. This curatorial process is driven largely by our political contexts, awareness, and conversations. For example, we preferred to use the word 'physical distancing' instead of 'social distancing', because of the casteist and classist connotations that the usage of the latter term can have in South Asian contexts." However, this process is always a work-in-progress for the three of them, as they are all constantly learning and unlearning.

Visually, Humairah and Omiya work together. With their two distinct lettering styles, they handwrite every word. They fuse their styles together for each set of words. They also set the colour schemes together. maliha mostly works on the texts and research.

"Banglay Boli has been fairly easy to manage, because this is mainly a personal and educational project for us, and we have a great working relationship," says Humairah. However, a major difficulty they face is the compression of the artworks on Instagram. "Oftentimes, the videos we post are compressed and recoloured to a slightly different variation of the original. Another important challenge is conducting actual research on

Bangla and the vocabulary, and deciding on the most appropriate word for a given context," adds Humairah. "We understand that language is not monolithic. It has diverse uses and practices, and the same word can be expressed and used in many different contexts and meanings."

"I grew up as an immigrant in the UAE. My Bengali roots are sometimes as distant to me as are Western values. As someone who didn't grow up speaking Bangla, I learned most of the Bangla that I know today from people, and not from books," adds maliha. "For someone like me whose first language is English, it can get difficult to find resources to learn Bangla. However, I am trying to break away from it and understand the world in Bangla too, because it is socio-politically very relevant for me to do so."

Moving forward, Banglay Boli's team intends to stay relevant to the social realities and political events around them, at any given time. However, they don't think of themselves as teachers or trailblazers. They are just three friends trying to learn Bangla together, while welcoming suggestions and including others in the process.

Madiha Athar Khan gets by in life with books, art exhibitions and making fluid art, hardly remembering that her day job is in technology. Reach her at madihak1923@gmail.com.

### UPG Sustainability Leadership Program 2021 in USA (Fully Funded)

United People Global (UPG) is a community that encourages and enables people to participate in making the world a better place. This is achieved in various ways and especially by contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UPG works to raise awareness, strengthen belief, facilitate collaboration, and foster community. DEADLINE: November 30, 2020 | Fellowships

### PeaceX Delegate Res Publica (Country Envoy): Call for Applications

PeaceX is an international peace and amity organisation that aims at casting a pall at the striking issues surrounding the development of peoples and is committed to impacting the lives of young people all over the world. Through collective leadership and action, they aim to have a tremendous social, political, economic and academic impact on the world. Pooling together the efforts, skills, zest, determination of the youth around the world will let us achieve the critical mass required to make that lasting positive impact on all nations. DEADLINE: November 22, 2020 | Awards



Team members and volunteers of Udoy paid homage to the Language Martyrs in February 2019.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF UDOY

# Shining as a positive light in healthcare and education

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Established in 2016, Udoy is a social organisation working for relief, rehabilitation, reform and development. They strive to facilitate healthcare and education for those in need, free of cost. Their other regular projects include blood donation and campaigns against drug addiction. Their team also provides financial assistance to people in need.

Udoy's journey of helping people began by collecting funds for a girl's marriage, after her father approached a group of young students for aid. They also came across students who dropped out of educational institutions due to poverty. "We realised that people wanted to help, but there weren't enough ways to channel this aid to the ones who need it the most," added A K M Mohiuddin Ahammed, Co-Founder, Udoy. "We created an inclusive platform for people to send in donations, while our members distributed the aid."



Volunteers of Udoy distributed face masks and hand sanitisers in different areas, earlier this year.

The organisation's annual activities include a healthcare campaign, under which they provide free medical facilities and distribute medicines. They invite doctors from different specialties and extend support to over 150 patients each year. They also award scholarships to students for their brilliant results

in their PSC, JSC, SSC, HSC, BSC and MSC examinations. "We have taken the responsibility of the education of five underprivileged meritorious students up to their SSC examinations," added Sheikh Russel, Co-founder of the organisation. During the ongoing pandemic, their team conducted an awareness campaign, post which they distributed 1,000 masks and 200 hand sanitisers. The organisation also distributed food packets among 150 underprivileged families. Furthermore, they provided Eid gifts to 100 destitute families.

Their future plans include ensuring medical assistance for those in need by establishing a community clinic. Udoy also intends to reduce the current drop-out rate by connecting students with responsible donors.

Maisha Islam Monamee likes to read her way through life, and you can always find her scribbling and planning. To send recommendations and help, reach out to her at mislammonamee@gmail.com.