

SOMETIMES I find it hard these days to find positive things to acknowledge or be proud of. Because to most of us Bangladesh has become a nightmare; a country run by corrupt politicians and plagued by unemployment, illiteracy, famine, robbery and murders.

I want to be a little positive about my beloved but ill-fated country. The chance came through a very prominent NGO in Bangladesh. They offered to take me to visit some of their ADP (Adolescent Development Programme) projects. This programme is basically for underprivileged adolescent girls of rural Bangladesh. One of these programmes was a training course in photography.

I was given a list of 88 adolescent girl photographers, now working commercially in rural areas. I decided to meet some of them and I selected Natore district for my visit.

It was the harvesting season, so everyone in the village seemed to be in a festive mood. Next morning I wanted to meet Mousumi Akhter, a photographer of Bhattopara, a village under Bashudevpur thana under Natore district. The distance between Natore town to Bhattopara is nearly 25 miles. When I reached Bhattopara, one of my colleagues suggested that we go to the local girls' school where Mousumi was studying. When she heard that I had gone from Dhaka to meet her, she was delighted.

So, she accompanied all of us to her small yet dainty tin-shed cottage. Mousumi was born in 1987 in Bhattopara, her father is a farmer, and also has a grocery shop. Mousumi has two older sisters who are married and one younger brother. One sister had passed IA and other sister could not pass SSC. This year Mousumi will appear in SSC examination from local Madnagar High School. I asked Mousumi to tell me the story of how she became a

Teenage Photographers Turn Professional

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From August 2003, Mousumi started photography commercially. She uses Fuji-100 film for her camera. Generally she takes 20 taka for each photograph. So, using just one reel Mousumi makes a good profit.

photographer.

Mousumi smiled. She said that her sister Mahinara Khatun was a project supervisor (PS) of an adolescent development project, Natore. At that time a big NGO was running a photography training course for adolescent girls. Through their local offices they were selecting interested girls for that training course. At first a girl named Sabina Khatun of Madnagar Girls High School was sent for that course, but she failed, she could not follow the photographic course. Then the Natore local office authority nominated Mousumi for that photographic course. She agreed without any hesitation. With an official of Nator local office Mousumi went to Savar training center of that famous NGO, where the course took place.

"It was a wonderful experience for me," says the teenage photographer. "Everything about the course was interesting."

The course provided a unique opportunity for all nine girls to get to know one another. They were from different and distant parts of Bangladesh. One girl came from Cox's Bazar, her name was Rita Rani Dey, another girl, Shilpi Akhter, was from Chandpur. Mousumi always remembers about her fellow trainees. Like Mousumi, the other trainees started their