decade, in changing the social attitude towards photography as a profession. Offering basic and advanced levels courses in this field, the institution also offers diploma and Bachelor equivalent courses to students. Very soon, a Master's level programme will also begin in collaboration with the University of Liberal Arts. The school is also a part of the upcoming regional Master's programme between universities in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Nepal, Norway and Pakistan.

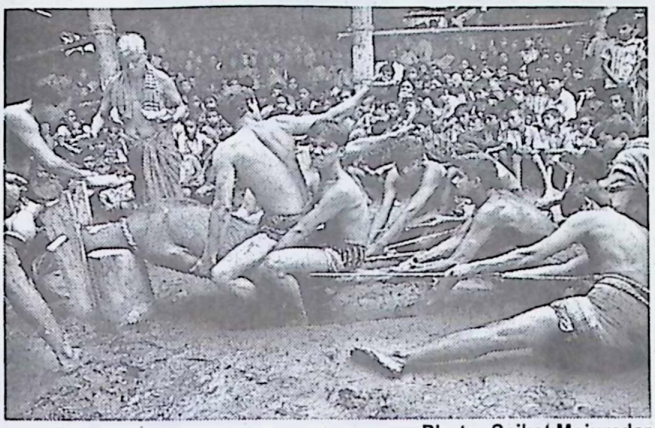


Photo: Saikot Mojumdar



Photo: Sazzad Ibne Syed

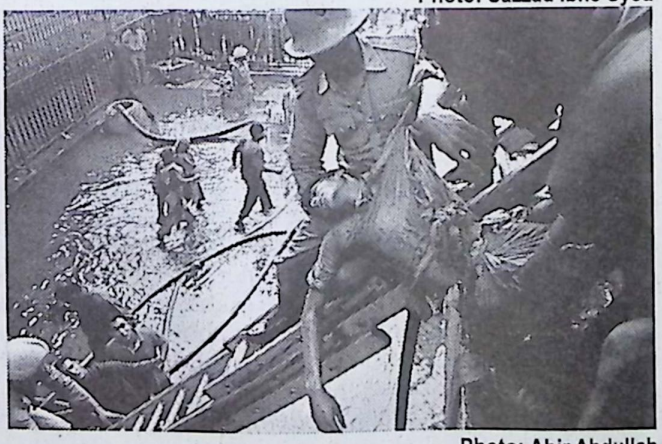


Photo: Abir Abdullah

Back in 1998, Pathshala had begun as a part of a three-year World Press Photo educational initiative in 1998. As the name Pathshala symbolises the ancient education system held in the open air, under the shade of a tree, free from the confining walls of a classroom, the institute emphasised on not merely conventional teaching the students. It allowed students to ask questions and develop their own style and perspective. The school was designed in a way that leads students to experience knowledge beyond the confines of the discipline.

According to Shahidul Alam, the Principal of the school and MD of Drik, Pathshala strives to do much more than teach photography. "It is about using the language of images to bring about social change. It is about nurturing minds and encouraging critical thinking. It is about responsible citizenship. In a land where textual literacy is low, it is about reaching out where words have failed. In a society where sleek advertising images construct our sense of values, studying at Pathshala is about challenging cultures of dominance."

According to Alam, in the South Asian region, the need for a structured education in photography has always been felt. Since photography plays a significant role in the mainstream media, this need is mostly felt in the field of photojournalism. "The people's right to information is generally not recognised by the official media in many countries," he says. "This is clearly also true for the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) nations. The lack of sufficient professional skills in the media, especially in the field of photojournalism, has also allowed successive governments to pass on propaganda in place of news, and the people's role in governance has been totally ignored."

Interestingly enough, most students, who go to this school, are studying subjects like Engineering, Medicine, BBA at other universities to comply with the conventional social mindsets. There are some, however, who end up choosing between passion and tradition, hence letting go of the so-called educational system approved by society. One such student is Azizur Rahman Peu, editor of Drik News, teacher at Pathshala and also one of the first students to have entered the school ten years ago. "I was studying medicine in Rongpur," he says, "when I practically ran away from home to Dhaka. I wanted to be a journalist. Back then, I didn't know how one would define a journalist. I used to think that a photographer was, obviously, what described a journalist, capturing and documenting moments in history. My love for photography, eventually, led me to start studying here at Pathshala."

Blaming not only the social net, but also the media in Bangladesh, students claim that even inside newsrooms, photographers are not given their worth. A photograph tells a story as well, which should complement the journalist's