



Preserving a Lifestyle

ANIK A HOSSAIN

Food has become a major source of concern of late for us Bangladeshis. The main cause of this is artificial preservatives and chemical fertilisers and pesticides that have negative effects on health, in some cases causing death. In such times, we look for healthy produce, preferably those which have been farmed using organic methods. One of the organisations bringing healthy food to us is Prabartana, in association with UBINIG (Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona), which is a policy and research organisation.

Formed in 1984 by a group of activists who support the peoples' movement for social, economic, political and cultural transformation, UBINIG's goal has been to work at a community level in various districts of the country to preserve respectful and responsible lifestyle.

One of their projects is to conserve the traditional methods of farming in our various districts and keep alive our local crops, some of which are on their way to extinction.

"The concept of organic farming is that local seeds are used to grow crops," says Rabiul Islam Chunnun, coordinator, UBINIG's Tangail Centre. "We believe that our farmers' main strength lies in these seeds. If they do not possess these, they become dependent on multinational companies for hybrid seeds which are only good for one time use. We encourage the use of local seeds and natural compost in farming, so that farmers can hold on to their seeds and reuse them later."

According to Rabiul, organic farming is slightly more costly because the productiv-

ity is less than it would be with hybrid seeds. "Although we do have varieties of seeds that have very high rates of productivity, but over time these have become quite rare," explains Rabiul. "For years, we have worked to explain and convince local farmers of the merits of organic farming and still continue to do so. In each village, we take on groups of 15 to 20 farmers at a time and



train them in organic farming methods. If we are not successful in explaining to them the importance of these home grown seeds, they will become extinct. In which case any multinational company can have a monopoly in the agricultural sector of our country and they will decide which crops we produce."

Rabiul explains that in the past, we had three main harvest seasons, Aaush, Amon

and Boro but now, the Aaush crops are already on their way to extinction. "During the Aaush season our field workers are basically unemployed for five to six months whereas once this was their busiest season," he says.

UBINIG has centres in nine districts all over the country. "From Cox's Bazaar, we get beans of different varieties, lentils and chola (chickpeas), Kushtia has akher gur (sugarcane molasses) which is available in Probortona, from Tangail we get khoi, muri (puffed rice) and paddy, from Ishwardi we get different types of spices. We also have centres in Rajshahi, Noakhali, Sirajganj, Jamalpur and Sherpur and we get different kinds of crops of each of these," says Rabiul.

At UBINIG, they train farmers to use natural pesticides made of neem leaves which have a bitter taste and other natural material. They also advice farmers to grow mixed crops because when there is crop diversity, the pest infestation is significantly lower.

"We also connect farmers from different areas so they can communicate about methods etc," says Rabiul. "We are affiliated with different international organisations, such as HEX (Switzerland) and SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) who are also donors, and they help us get in touch with farmers abroad who are working with related projects. We have farmer exchange programs that allow us to send our farmers abroad to learn their techniques and vice versa."

UBINIG has been working on food sovereignty for the past twenty years reaching out to local farmers, explaining to them the importance of conserving their heritage, which is ultimately our greatest strength.

A Journey Unexpected

NAZIBA BASHER

Coming from an ordinary middle class family and spending his childhood in Bhairab, his hometown, Din M Sumon Rahman thought he was destined to become a businessman like his father. He studied in a local school there and led quite an ordinary life until he came across 'Khela Ghor'- a center for the practice of extra-curricular activities.

"I used to go to their library and read as much as I possibly could. I immersed myself in books about politics, history, fiction, science fiction- whatever I had come across," says Sumon. He also began writing then and wrote for some newspapers and other magazines.

In the year 1967, he joined Jahangir Nagar University and was influenced by some professors to join the Philosophy department because, to them, he clearly had the knack. He then joined BRAC University in the pursuit of a Master's Degree in Development, after which he decided to get enrolled into the National University of Singapore (NUS) for a PhD in Urban Poverty. In the journey of pursuing his doctorate on the subject, he came across music as a part of urban poverty and his interest then diverged. He then decided to change his PhD thesis' topic to Cultural Studies. Due to this sudden change, he had to leave NUS and move to the University of Queensland, Australia, to continue and move his thesis further. "I didn't expect them to accept me in their university because barely any university accepts students who have already finished their thesis half way. But Graem Turner, professor of Cultural Studies in the university, had accepted me because he had faced similar problems with his thesis. He was of great help and had inspired me a lot with my work," says Sumon.

In the year 2005, he published his first book, which was an Anthology, called 'Dekha, Nah Dekhar Chokhi' which ended up in the list of Best Sellers of that year's Ekushey Boi Mela. In 2008, he compiled seven short stories written by him in a book called 'Goribi Aumorota' and had it published. In the same year, he wrote and published a poetry book called 'Ceramic

er Nijersho Jhogra'. And lastly, in 2011, he wrote and published a book called 'Kanaar Haat Bazaar', which revolved around the subjects he mastered in throughout his academic years- cultural studies and pop culture.

In 2013, Sumon joined University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (ULAB) as Associate Professor, Department of Media Studies and Journalism. "Being a part of ULAB has given me a lot of benefits. The university funds researches and that has come very much in handy for me as I have



always had a passion for researching and writing based on what I research," says Sumon. His next great agenda is to write a novel. "This time, I'm moving away from the academics and indulging into my creativity," exclaims Sumon. With 20 years of experience in mostly academic writing, Sumon finds it both exciting and unnerving to step into the realm of creativity. As for us, we just have to wait a little longer for another great Sumon Rahman masterpiece!



The Story of an IDEA GUY

ELITA KARIM

Wahid Ibn Reza, popularly known as Bappy amongst friends, family and colleagues, is a writer, actor, and filmmaker. "I am an 'idea guy,'" he says. "I don't call myself a talented person. I am simply a hard worker who believes in the word 'smile'."

After completing a BSc in Mechanical Engineering from BUET, the next step for Bappy, naturally, would have been to obtain a Master's degree. "I was always interested in films," he says. "Halfway through my BSc, I realised that I was actually wasting my time!" He did not drop out, however. After graduating from BUET, Bappy decided to start all over again and applied for a BFA in Film Production at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Bappy was so thrilled studying film, he also made the Dean's list at UBC for the academic year 2011-2012.

The all-rounder Bappy wrote, directed, executive produced and starred in his graduation short-- 'What am I doing here?' which won the Best Cinematography award at the Persistence of Vision (POV) Film festival. The film was short listed for the Toronto International Film Festival and got accepted into the International Student Film Festival – Pisekin Czech Republic in 2013. The film also got accepted into Golden Egg Film Festival, LA 2014 where, it has been nominated for Best Short Film, Best Original Screenplay, Best Director of a Short film, Best Lead Actor and Best Supporting Actress categories. "At present, I am working on

multiple shorts and a few features, which are in the developing stage," he adds. "I hope to shoot my first feature by 2015-2016."

Wahid Ibn Reza Bappy has worked with the legendary writer and director, Humayun Ahmed. He is well known for playing the famous character Himu, created by Humayun Ahmed. In fact, he would actually dress himself in yellow at the Ekushay Boi Mela every February, to honour the character and also the writer himself. He was also the lead in his 26- episode drama serial 'Chandra Karigor', and several other television dramas. Bappy was also showcased in several ad-films, fictions and non fictions such as BBC Buzz. In Canada. He worked on a popular web-series 'Fools for Hire' and won Outstanding Guest Actor award at LA Web Fest.

Currently, working for the Oscar winning company, Moving Picture Company (MPC) as a Production Coordinator and working on multiple features from major studios such as Universal, 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers, Bappy's chance entry into North American Television occurred when he did an internship for NBC Universal and worked on two television shows-- 'Suits' and 'Defiance'. "I also worked as a PA for Cartoon Network's hit new show 'Rick and Morty'."

Clearly, Wahid Ibn reza Bappy wants to be a major part of Hollywood productions. "And I am halfway there!" he says. "Once I start producing on my own, I will be able to present Bangladeshi films to the rest of the world."

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