

THROUGH THE YEARS

Bangladeshi Photographers

NAZIBA BASHER

Bangladeshi Photographers (BP) is a community of photographers that was started in September 2005 as an online group in Flickr by Mohammad Raqibul Hasan. "Bangladesh has a lot of talent in this field. I recognised that a long time ago, but I could not find a way to physically connect all of them together as a lot of them lived abroad. I thought of starting an online community to get all the BP members connected to each other. I knew that once the idea exchanging would begin, the photography arena in our country would change forever, and so it has," says Mohammad Raqibul Hasan. The project of BP was initially thought of by Hasan, who soon turned to two more photographers for help. Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo, Mohammad Moniruzzaman and Mohammad Raqibul Hasan turned BP into the first online photography based community.

Eventually, the group evolved and had more of a cross-platform approach. During the last few years, BP has actively organised exhibitions, competitions and community meet-ups, while its online platforms in Flickr and Facebook continue as constant support for beginners, advanced photographers and also hobbyists. It currently has over 40,000 members (and counting), including the founders and 20 moderators.



PHOTO: COURTESY

"For a teenager who could not even operate a camera, being able to know and be connected to the veteran photographers of Bangladesh was very inspiring and helpful," says 21-year-old Ata Islam Khan Mojlish, Head of Communications and Moderator, who had started off at the age of 15.

On World Photography Day, BP has a lot to boast about, with some of the most influential exhibitions held for young photographers. 'Globalisation: A Bipolar Story' was their joint endeavour with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). There is also "BP (BP

Challenge", which challenges photographers to compete with their best images. The best photographs are awarded with cash prizes. "Humans of Bangladesh" is a project of BP which aims to express the many different stories of people living in Bangladesh. Inspired by the project 'Humans of New York', BP has created the platform for many photographers working together, via simple portraits and a small write ups. "SIDR Aid exhibition and Exhibition for Samudra Gupta" was organised at the Russian Cultural Centre to support the victims of Cyclone Sidr in remote parts of the country. In February, the same exhibition was continued at the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University to aid in the treatment of poet Samudra Gupta. Many more exhibitions and competitions have been held by them, both for charity or raising awareness, and to inspire photographers.

BP has successfully become the ultimate influence in many photographers' lives and is continuing to do so. "I founded BP with the others when I was only 14 years old," says Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo. "Since then, it has been like a home to me. Through BP, I experienced my first achievements and success. Now, after 9 years, I believe that there is no way I could have become what I have, as a photographer and a person, if it was not for the organisation."

Activism Through Photography

ANIKA HOSSAIN

Taslima Akhter is widely known for her photograph, 'Last Embrace,' which depicts the heart wrenching image of two victims of the Rana Plaza tragedy, locked in a desperate embrace under the rubble. This photograph, featured in the Time Magazine as one of the top ten photos of 2013, is not just a haunting image, but a protest, says Akhter. "I identify myself first and foremost as an activist," she informs us, "My photography is a part of my activism."

Taslima Akhter studied in Dhaka University, where she completed her MS and M.Phil in Public Administration. She later completed her studies on Photojournalism from Paatshala. During her student years, Akhter was a part of the Bangladesh Student Federation, "In 2008, when our country was in a political emergency situation, and all political gatherings were banned, I decided to use my time to hone my skills in photography and further my interest in the field," comments Akhter.

Akhter is interested in highlighting the social, environmental and political issues of Bangladesh in her photographic work. "I have been working for more than six years with garment workers," says Akhter, "I started a project at Paatshala on the lives of garment workers within and outside of the factories focusing on their struggles and strengths. This was not a commissioned project, I worked for myself."



PHOTO: KAZI TAHsin AGAZ APURBO

When the fire at Tazreen Garments broke out, Akhter was there, documenting and lending a helping hand. "In the past I worked with salary, safety, union rights etc but after the Tazreen incident, safety became a priority," says Akhter. The same was true with the incident at Rana Plaza, where Akhter and her group were not only documenting, but also helping with the rescue mission. "I have worked with countless victims of Rana Plaza after this, to help them organise and receive aid," Akhter informs us. "I am coordinating Garments Sramik Sangathan (garment worker's union) through which we are bringing out a book about Rana Plaza, which will include stories of the victims we

have managed to interview, a list of dead as well as missing workers, with their photos. Hopefully this publication will help raise awareness."

Aside from these, Akhter has worked on projects about, Lalon, Dhaka city, Phulbari, Nandigram in Kolkata and much more. "I also received a scholarship in New York, USA, from Magnum and NYU, where I worked on a project about single mothers," says Akhter.

"In 2010 when the wage protest was ongoing, I had an exhibition in Drik to show support," says Akhter, "I also had exhibitions in NY, Germany and Norway and after the Rana Plaza crisis, four others and I had an exhibition in front of Rana Plaza. The Lalon exhibitions were held in the homes of the devotees. I focus my efforts in trying to hold exhibits where the photos are taken, that is not always possible but in the future I hope it will be."

Akhter has received many awards for her work namely, the Best Photography Award from 5Th Dal International Photography Exhibition in China in 2013, the World Press Photo Award and the POYI Award (photo of the year international) among others.

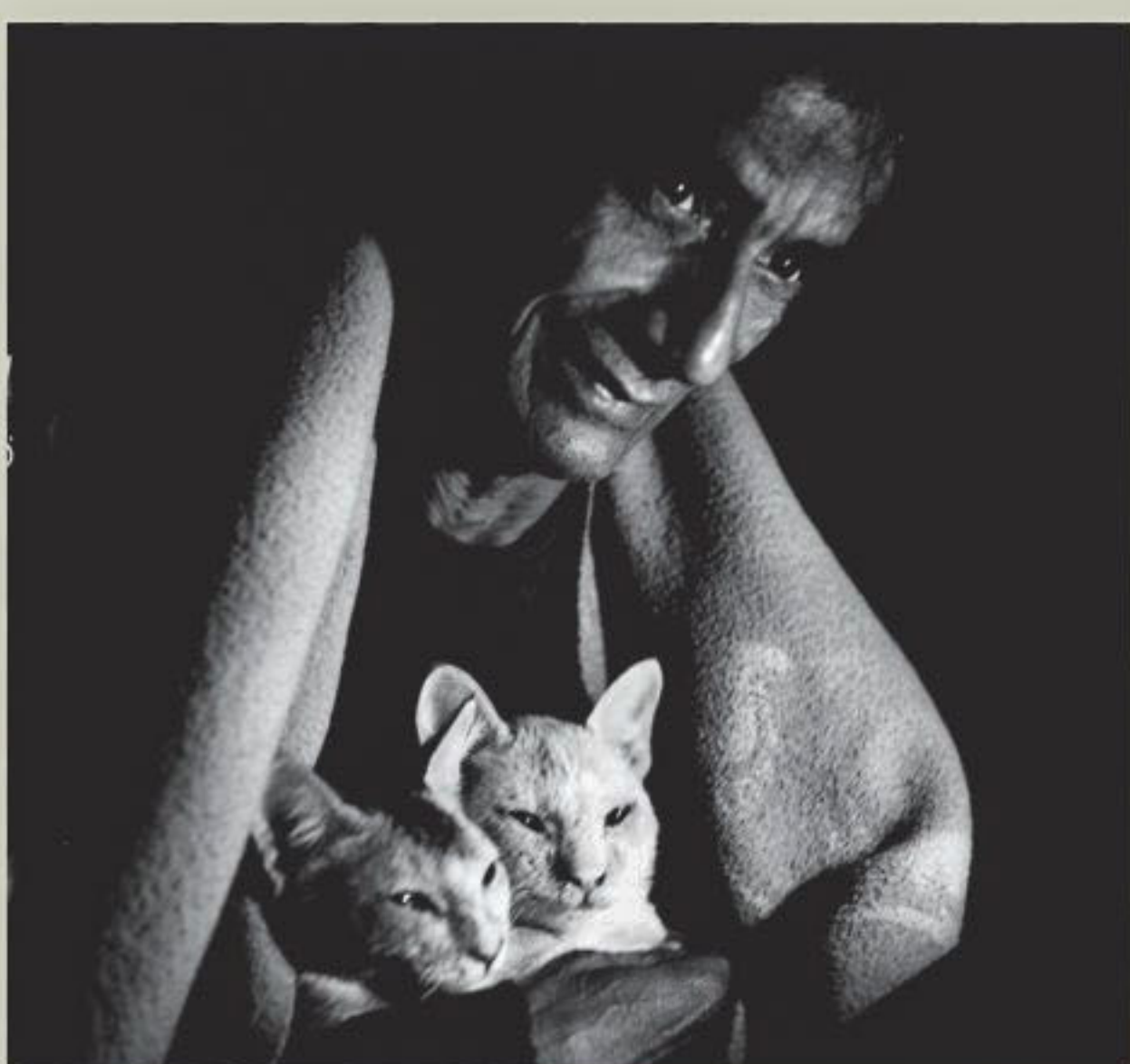
"I think whichever field anyone wants to work in, be it photography or something else, they must think about why they want to pursue it and whether it will make a difference in society. I think these questions are important to answer to oneself before pursuing any interest," she opines.



NASIR ALI MAMUN SELF-PORTRAIT 2010 NEW YORK PHOTOSEUM

Poetry of Portraits

Nasir Ali Mamun's portraits are, in some ways, poignant -- bringing out the emotion. "My portraits may reflect some darkness, because most the famous people I have worked have sad personal lives,"



S M SULTAN

PHOTO: NASIR ALI MAMUN PHOTOSEUM

1972. I remember the first portraits I took were of poet Ahsan Habib, poet and writer ANM Bazlul Rashid and communist leader Comrade Moni Singh -- all taken on the same day."

Nasir Ali Mamun's portraits are, in some ways, poignant -- bringing out the emotion. "My portraits may reflect some darkness, because most the famous people I have worked have sad personal lives," says Mamun. "I can relate to them because my life wasn't a bed of roses either."

Mamun is now currently busy with developing his "Photosium", a photography museum which will also build his personal archives. Many young photographers look up to Nasir Ali Mamun as a mentor. "My only advice to you is -- don't take anybody's advice!" says Mamun. "You guys have all the information you need. The world is yours to colour."

APURBA JAHANGIR

Born in July 1, 1953, Nasir Ali Mamun is described as the father of portrait photography in Bangladesh. He is best known for his portraits of internationally recognised celebrities such as Stephen Hawking, Mother Teresa, Dr Muhammad Yunus, S M Sultan and many more. He has done over 53 solo exhibitions and has published 10 books.

"When I was a child, I used to see photographs of famous people on newspapers. They used to get me thinking -- the story behind the work, how the photographs were taken etc. That is how I became interested in portrait photography," says Nasir Ali Mamun. But his journey didn't begin till 1968 when he first picked up the camera. Mamun adds, "Though I started taking pictures around that time, I got into portraits around



PHOTO: TASLIMA AKHTER