



Murtuza Ahmed Khan

Closing the Margins

NAZIBA BASHER

OBAT Helpers is an NGO whose objective is to help the Bihari community flourish by empowering the youth. Around 10 years ago, in September 2004, after a lot of unrest and restricted privileges, positive light was shed on the Bihari community of Bangladesh. Anwar Khan, founder of OBAT Helpers, a Bangladeshi living in the USA, came across an article about the plight of the forgotten Urdu speaking community.

OBAT Helpers have already rehabilitated 2000 families in 10 years, with a vision to reach 10,000 in another 10 years.

He read about their hardships and struggle, as they lived in their community with no help or privileges. He knew he had to do something about this. "I realised that I'm living this life because Allah has given me the privilege, and the only way I can thank Him for it is by helping those in need," says Anwar.

He set up a meeting with his friends and family and decided to take responsibility for a Bihari family and help them in any way that was possible. Upon his visit to the camps in Dhaka,



Anwar Khan

he noticed that there was no way he could help just one single family. His visits increased, and he went to the camps outside of Dhaka. When in Rangpur, he saw that the women had to bathe in broad daylight with no privacy. The money he carried for one family was then invested in building bathrooms for the women of the camp in Rangpur. Thus, the journey of OBAT Helpers began.

"When the question of empowerment comes up, I believe the first way to go about it is with education," says Anwar.

Since then, OBAT Helpers have established 57 educational programmes, including 27 pre-schools, 7 primary schools, 1 high school and also an education programme for working children. These institutes are situated all over the country. OBAT also provides scholarships for the students, and has opened a youth think-tank. The think-tank has the goal to develop the youth of the community and train them to help and develop the community further. "We hold brain-storming sessions with the children to point out and list

the problems in the community, like sanitation. We then come up with solutions and hold projects like clean-up campaigns," says Murtuza Ahmed Khan, coordinator and convener of OBAT Youth Think-Tank and Dhaka Correspondent of OBAT Helpers. This year, thanks to OBAT Helpers, 30 pupils from the Bihari community, studying under OBAT, have received GPA 5 scores in the PSC examinations. Along with educational institutes, OBAT Helpers provides the community with clean water, which used to be a scarce

resource in the camps due to ignorance of authorities. There are health clinics set up for camp residents along with a mobile clinic that can move from area to area for check-ups.

Their micro-financing project was created to help the more elderly. By giving loans without interest, OBAT helps the women and men start up their own businesses so they can earn enough money on their own to buy their own houses and even lands.

The effort that OBAT Helpers have put into the community is already being rewarded with success. Abul Quasem, a student of OBAT, who grew up in the camp, has become the first Bihari in 43 years to get admitted in medical school, while others are going on to completing their education and getting jobs in banks and more. Murtuza Ahmed Khan himself, who has been volunteering for the community from the age of 7, has gone on to be a success of OBAT along with his brother who works for Unilever now.

OBAT Helpers have already rehabilitated 2000 families in 10 years, with a vision to reach 10,000 in another 10 years. "We are hoping for the rehabilitation to have a snowball effect, so that one empowered family can help another in need," says Anwar Khan. With OBAT's strong objectives and unshakable motivation, we can now hope for a day when the word 'camp' will be obliterated and every living person in Bangladesh will have equal rights.

A Roadie by Heart



APURBA JAHANGIR

The man is known for his enormous contribution to our music industry. He may not sing or play any instrument, but he is still considered a legend. He is claimed to be the first true roadie, a musician's doctor, the go-to-guy for everything and even a healer. Abdur Rafique is the first guitar tech in this country and has been repairing musical instruments for over 28 years.

Rafique started off as a technician, repairing televisions in the early 70's. "Back then repairing televisions was a very big deal because we didn't have many TVs. I remember going to a village with a co-worker to repair a TV set and there were people lined up at the station to see us," says Rafique. His journey in the music industry began with the pop revolution in Bangladesh. Rafique started would repair amplifiers and speakers for artists, namely Ferdous Wahid and Pilu Momtaz. It was around that time that Rafique first got his hands on an electric guitar. "At first I was a little scared to handle the electric guitar. Back then, equipment was really expensive and these were the first batch of instruments which were imported in our country. But the fear slowly went away when I started to work with it," he says. But Rafique never wanted to repair guitars as a full time stint. "I was unsure when it came to making the decision but an acquaintance of mine really inspired me to do it. I remember he said, 'This is going to last a life time'- which it really did."

In the early 1980's, Rafique started his own shop, Rafique Electronics, which is still located on Science Laboratory Road. "As I was the first one to open up an instrument repair shop, musicians started lining up at the front gate and I was really overwhelmed by this response. I realised it was worth taking the risk," says Rafique.

His journey in the music industry began with the pop revolution in Bangladesh. Rafique started off as a technician repairing amplifiers and speakers for artists namely Ferdous Wahid and Pilu Momtaz.