

Every morning, crowds of children in school uniforms are seen walking through the maze of alleys at the Karail slum. Their chatter and laughs make the alleyways a lively place for some time. These children attend schools especially built for slum dwelling children by BRAC—the world's largest NGO that has established numerous primary schools across the country for the underprivileged, for whom even primary education is a luxury.

Like all BRAC primary schools, the one in Karail slum is a single-room hut. However, its speciality is its walls and ceilings which are colourfully decorated with paintings and paper flowers made by its little occupants that show how these children adore their school. The young



STUDYING IN KARAIL

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

After completing a lesson, Shushmita tells the students to divide themselves into small groups. Within moments, all the thirty students form six groups and start discussions on their lesson. Every group



BRAC primary school at the Karail slum.

learners love to welcome any visitor to their school with smiling faces.

Their teacher, Shushmita Hussain, is a young woman in her 20s. "The school is absolutely free of cost and BRAC provides us with all kinds of learning materials. The children learn difficult textbook lessons through fun games and group activities," she says.

A very special feature of the school is the ratio of male and female students.

Shafiqul Islam, branch manager of BRAC Education Programme says, "We ensure that 60 percent students of our school are female and 40 percent are male. Most of our students had previously dropped out from different schools before they were admitted here," he continues, "Our one-teacher school is run by the same teacher for the entire period of four years and teaches all subjects. Our students have been performing very well in the PSC exams."

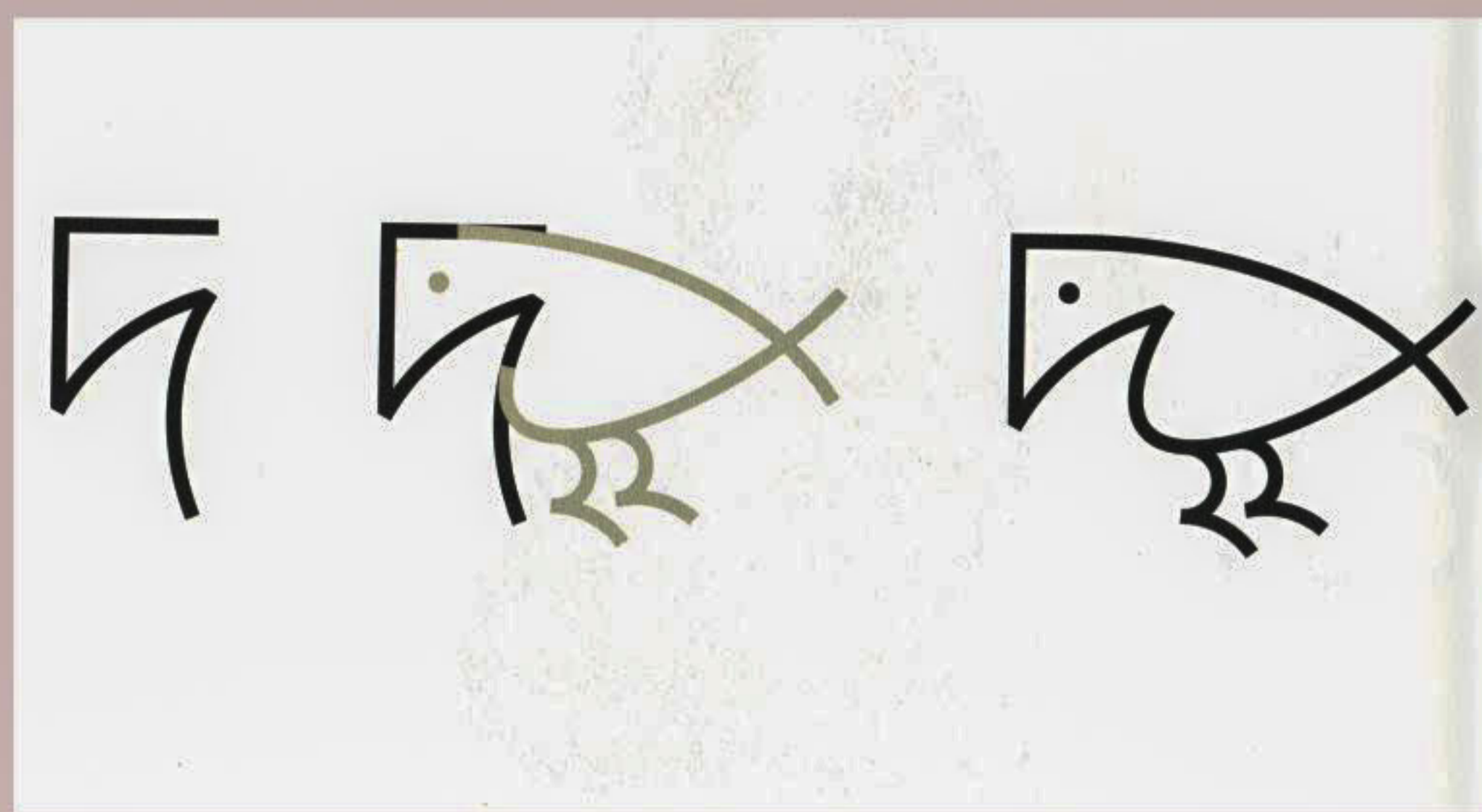
has a unique name. Sanjida Akhter from Shapla group says, "Besides group study, we also sing, play music and draw pictures during group activities."

BRAC schools put emphasis on co-curricular activities. The students usually conclude their class with a song or dance. Besides singing and dancing, the school introduces an ingenious activity called "Aflatoon corner". "Aflatoon means the finder," Salahuddin, a student of the school says about the activity, "In this activity, we are taught to reuse old materials to create new useful things. I have collected some pieces of cloth and have made a bag all by myself."

Over the past 26 years, BRAC has set a new standard for primary education through its schools and innovative system. It has been creating a generation that is creative, conscious of equal rights and enthusiastic learners.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

EDUCATION



ARTWORK BY SABYASACHI HAZRA

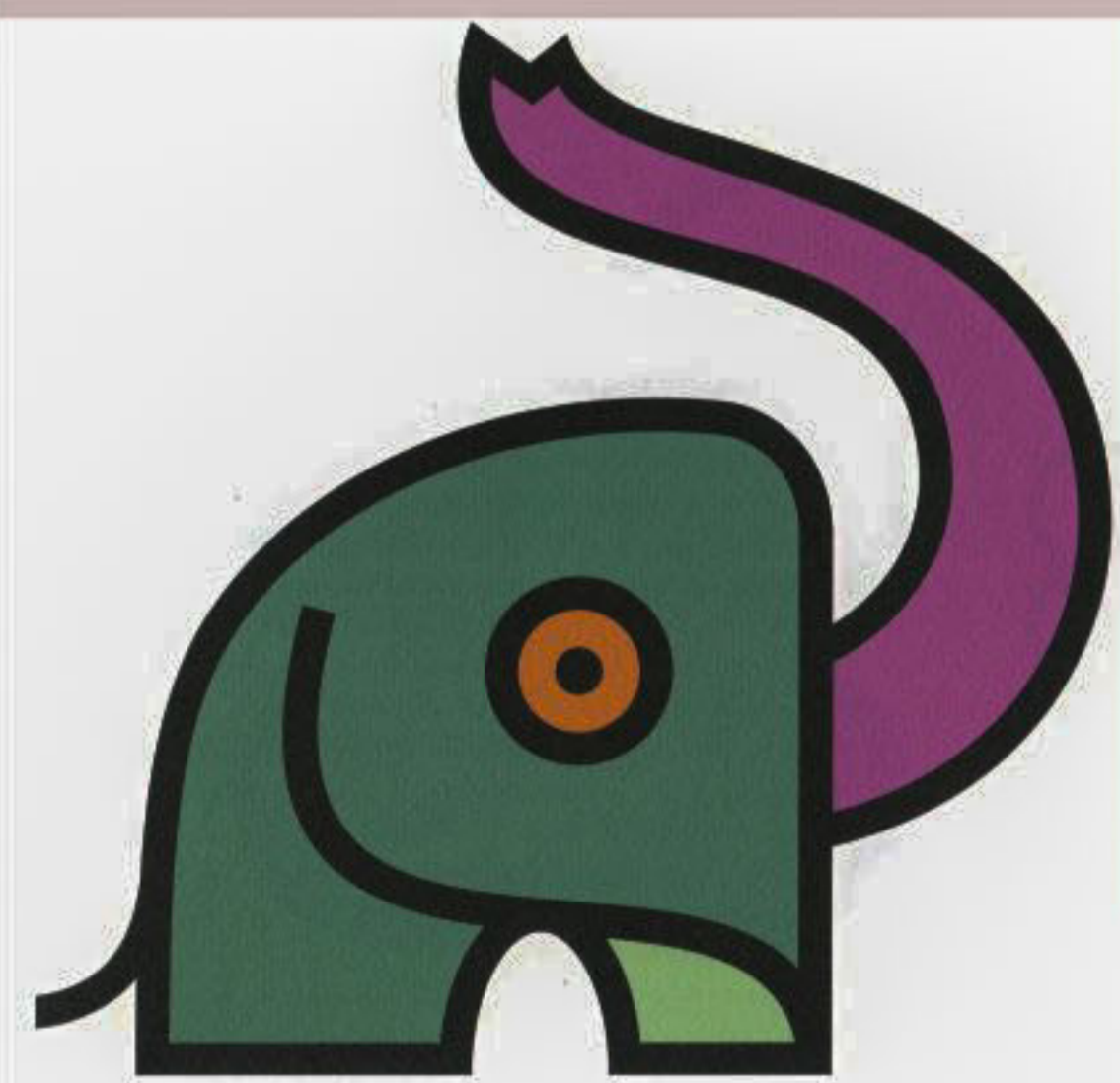
FUN LEARNING!

NAZIBA BASHER

Chitralipi, by Sabyasachi Hazra, is, in one word, unique. Merging education and art, Chitralipi can be exceptionally handy to people of all ages, learning Bangla. Even if it isn't bought for educational purposes, one can look at each page and observe the art behind every Bengali letter in the alphabet.

Sabyasachi Hazra's purpose for this book, although, was entirely educational. Knowing the child mindset before they are enrolled into school, he observed how children know of birds, flowers, fish, fruits, vegetables etc, long before they are taught the alphabet. Chitralipi depicts each alphabet as a particular thing- cat, dog, flower, etc- that makes it easier for children to remember the letters. For example, the first three letters are depicted as a peacock, a flower and a duck, respectively. The child in question will only have to remember

these in order to remember which letter comes after the other. The letters are shown in steps- transforming from an ordinary letter into an animal or thing. Even this particular transformation of a letter into, for example, a bird, will help children retrace their steps into remembering the alphabet. On the long run, Chitralipi will have an effect on the children's minds in a very positively unique manner, compared to what we see in regular schooling. ■



STAR PEOPLE

BREAKING ALL BOUNDS

APURBA JAHANGIR



Ferdousy Priyobhashini
PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

In the world of sculpting, Ferdousy Priyobhashini needs no introduction. Being one of the eminent sculptors of current times, Priyobhashini has created a diverse genre through her unique ways. Priyobhashini was honoured with the title 'Hero' by the Reader's Digest magazine in its December 2004 issue for the valour she displayed in acknowledging herself as a war-victim. Her other awards include Chadernath Podok, Ananna Shirshow Podok, Silver Jubilee Award by YWCA,

Human Rights Award by Manabadhikar Sangstha and many more.

Born in 1947, in the district of Khulna; she got her unique name from her grandfather. At a young age, she received a lot of prizes for various competitions from Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haq. "A K Fazlul Haq used to live just a couple of blocks away from our house. Though I received a number of prizes from him, I was always scared of his giant figure," says Priyobhashini. Being a book worm, she

considered herself to be the happiest woman in the world when she received books as prizes.

Priyobhashini started sculpting when she lived in Jessore during 1984-1988. She started to decorate her house with bamboos and other natural elements which attracted a lot of visitors. "My house soon turned into some kind of a 'tourist spot' for visitors. When famous individuals such as Kanika Banargee, Alam Dutta, S M Sultan, Wahidul Haque and Sanjida Khatun

admired my work of art, I realised I can give sculpting a chance," says Priobhashini. What started as a pastime made Priyobhashini one of the best in her field.

Priyobhashini thinks it is a very good sign that more women are now getting into different sectors of art. "In my opinion, gender is not a factor when it comes to art. But I feel proud that even after getting the trademark as the weaker sex, many women have come out of it and proved themselves in many fields." ■

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Towfique Ahmad Khan is a Bangladeshi youth leader and activist whose initiative for regional peace and prosperity has spread throughout South Asia. With chapters in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, his organisation, South Asian Youth Society (SAYS), has become the envoy of youth activism for peace and community development in this region. The idea of forming a regional network of youth activists hit Towfique's mind when he was studying as a fellow of the Study of the US Institutes for Scholars programme.

"During the program I felt that Bangladesh and its rich cultural heritage, is not at all well represented. Very few efforts have been made to utilise the promising youth potential from South Asian countries," Towfique shares.

After returning, Towfique visited educational institutes in different parts of Bangladesh to mobilise the youth for community development. When Towfique founded his organisation in 2008, he focused on civic education and training on active citizenship with the goal of ensuring youth empowerment, community development and, peace and prosperity in South Asia.

Thanks to Towfique's dedication, the message of SAYS for regional peace and prosperity has crossed Bangladesh's border. Besides supporting 1400 young volunteers in Bangladesh, the organisation has been running in five South Asian countries with at least 60 volunteers in each. Besides arranging training for capacity development, SAYS also organises national and international youth summits to increase youth participation in policy making.

From the very first years of university, Towfique has been working to build such a platform. He is now completing his Master's Degree. "As the son of a freedom fighter, I had the dream to maintain my father's legacy by contributing to my people," he says. "It is the young generation now who will lead their country to its economic emancipation."

Towfique Ahmad Khan
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS