

THE MOANOUGHAR

"Amaa Jaga Amaa Ghar, Amaa Bego Moanoghar, Suge Duge Edu Thei, Bekkun Ami Vei Vei"

ANVIL CHAKMA, RAMGAMATI

(Our land, our house: This is our Moanoghar. Sad or happy, we live here maintaining our brotherhood.)

The morning starts with children waking up listening to the prayer song of the Moanoghar. The Moanoghar is one of the most traditional institutions of Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is situated at Rangamati's Rangapani area. Here, underprivileged ethnic children from the three Hill Tracts area come to study. Once upon a time, it was also known as the Shantiniketan of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, at present, this popular institution is facing dilemma due to financial issues.

Tara Chakma, a student of the Moanoghar Residential School, says, "When I was 5 years old, I got admitted to this school. Now I am a student of class six of this school." The school is located at Betchari's remote area of Suvolong union under Barkal upazila of Rangamati.



PHOTOS: ANVIL CHAKMA



Tara continues, "Earlier, I had to commute from my village to my previous school by crossing four kilometers on a boat. It was a difficult journey. Also, my father is no more. So, my mother could not maintain my studies. That is when she enrolled me

in to Moanoghar."

The Moanoghar authorities say that about 1,300 students are currently studying at the Moanoghar Residential School. Around 700 students belong to the ethnicity of Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Bawm, Lusai, Pankua and other different areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. At present, Moanoghar runs on the funds it receives from its own income-generating programmes. To run the residential school and ensure its children's daily meals, they have set-up a bakery, a stationary store, a weaving and computer training centre. However, these are not enough for the institution to continue to run on its own.

The Journey:

In 1961, a religious Buddhist monk named Jnanasree Mahathero established a Buddhist orphanage centre at

the Boalkhali area of Dighinala upazila of Khagrachari. Later, four other Buddhist monks named Bimal Tisso Mohathero, Shradha Lankar Mohathero, Priyo Tisso Bhikku and Proggya Nonda Mohathero planned to shift the orphanage to Rangamati from Dighinala. In 1974, the orphanage began its journey with the name Moanoghar at Rangapani area under the Rangamati municipality.

The Meaning Behind Moanoghar:

The term "moanoghar" is used to describe the temporary shafts that people living in the hilly regions build upon their fields to store the harvest. Moanoghar is used to store the harvest for first six months and later, people go back to their villages with the crops for the later six months.

Ashok Kumar Chakma, the Executive Director of Moanoghar, says, "At

present, we are facing financial problems to run Moanoghar. The orphanage and poor children of the remote areas of the CHT are studying in this institution. It is not possible for their parents to arrange for other means of education for their children. So, the children are being educated with the financial support from some organisations. Even then, it's not enough. We urge the government to help Moanoghar for its development and continuation."

Kirti Nishan Chakma, the General Secretary of Moanoghar's executive committee says, "Those who come to Moanoghar usually live in remote areas of the three hill districts, where there are no other schools. Most of these children have already lost their parents." Nishan adds, "To reconcile with technical knowledge, we need a

technical school. We see a dream that the CHT children will come here and cultivate their minds through technical education and go back to their homes or workplace with the light of knowledge."

The Moanoghar officials have said that a support agency from France carried all the expenses of Moanoghar to build the necessary infrastructures. The French humanitarian organisation named Partage provided funds from 1982 to 1983.

When the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs was formed after the Peace Accord of 1997, Partage stopped funding as the ministry took over some of the financial responsibilities of the school. However, during the caretaker government's regime, the fund was temporarily stopped and the school began to face crisis. At that time, Rotary Foundation of the Rotary Club, Karwan Bazaar, helped the institution for three long years by providing with scholarships. At that time, the institution received Tk 1 lac grant from the Social Welfare Ministry, but it was not enough to cover even the daily meals of the 500 residential students or the salary of the 80 full time staff of the school.

Facing many ups and downs, Moanoghar has reached its 43th anniversary this year. Its mission to provide education is currently being hampered due to financial problems. Therefore, the only traditional educational institution of Chittagong Hill Tracts needs the patronage of both domestic and foreign donor agencies and social personalities, including the government's support.

All that Moanoghar needs at this time are proper funding and a strong professional management to run the facility. Continuing its task of kindling the light of knowledge amongst ethnic children, Moanoghar would be able to bring back its lost glory.

Workshops on Hygiene, HIV, STD and more

AFSANA AZIZ NITOL

In the heart of Mymensingh, there exists a dingy confined hallway, with little scope to even see the sky properly. The place is called Nazma Boarding Brothel. Among the twenty brothel-villages that are legal in the country, Nazma Boarding is one of them.

The ugly truth is that a lot of sex-workers inside the brothel have little to no knowledge about HIV and STDs whereas they are most vulnerable to these diseases. To help this disregarded group of people in the society, Awareness 360, a non-profit youth organisation, held a health awareness cam-



PHOTOS: COURTESY

Becoming a Changemaker: Global Youth Summit 2017

SHAH RAFAYAT CHOWDHURY

Memories are still afresh as I write this article. A couple of weeks ago, I was able to experience an incredible opportunity with 59 other likeminded people. These 59 people weren't just any ordinary beings; they were global changemakers.

This year's Global Youth Summit was held in Aarau, hosted by renowned Swiss NGO 'Global Changemakers', just an hour away from Zurich in Switzerland. The summit brought together 60 young activists and entrepreneurs from around the world who were implementing their ideas and working on projects to make their communities better places to live in. The opportunity for me not only meant that I was representing my organisation 'Footsteps Foundation', but also Bangladesh on a global platform.

The summit began early morning the next day. I was truly awe-struck by the people who were part of this program. One of them was Miro from Los Angeles, an 18-year-old hat-loving traveler who wanted to advocate travel as a form of education. There was Vini from Brazil, who created an online platform called PASSEI! that empowers public high school students to access university level education. Another would be Mai, who was born in Wahat al Salam Neve Shalom, the only intentional Jewish Arab village in Israel who is now a peace advocate and human rights lawyer.

The 5-day-long summit was an incredible learning experience. Games and workshops were arranged to test our ideas and creativity, and even though it drained every bit of energy from my body, I never felt so alive. The opportunity to learn from each other had been a priceless experience; getting to know difficulties that some faced, how they overcame such notions, and how every effort no matter how big or small made tremendous impacts. Notable speakers such as comedian Francesca Martinez and Global Citizen's Katie Dallas reminded us of how important it was to chase our ideologies no matter how difficult the obstacles were. The summit ended with a moving oath taking session, where we were initiated as global changemakers. Each of us were handed a piece of paper, where we had to write down our biggest kryptonite and then throw it into the bonfire set for us. This became extremely emotional for me, as tears rolled down my eyes when I finally pledged as a global changemaker after throwing my kryptonite into the gushing fire.

On our last day in Switzerland, we finally had the chance to tour the city of Zurich. The city is truly like no other -- clean and organised with a medieval touch. The water is so clean in the city that you can actually see the stones in the bottom of the lake Zurich! We had a city walk and a cruise planned, after which we were taken to the Greenpeace warehouse where we were taught how to hand

make banners. A reception was arranged for us at the end of the tour at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, one of the finest institutes in the world. Dressed rather formally, we ended up networking with the guests, which included the US ambassador to Switzerland, enjoying the view, and of course, capturing life long memories on our cameras.

The last night in Aarau was an emotional one. We stayed up all night, singing songs about friendship and writing scraps of letter to one another. 5 days had gone by so fast that we weren't ready to say goodbye to each other yet. However, as the saying goes, every good song must end at some time.

The Global Youth Summit was the perfect environment to get close to these amazing 59 people, who were already changing the world; and as I was reading the scrap letter they wrote for me on my flight back home, it was hard holding back my tears. I knew I had a part of an extended family at all corners of the world, and if I needed to make a change, whether it's creating access to clean drinking water or helping vulnerable communities adapt to Climate Change, all I had to do was give a shout out to them. That's why they say, the journey of a changemaker is never a solitary one.

The writer is the Co-Founder and President of Footsteps Foundation and an environmental economics major at Pennsylvania State University.



paign on 9 August 2017 at Nazma Boarding Brothel. Shomy Hasan Chowdhury and Rijve Arefin were the co-ordinators of the project called Make Brothels in Bangladesh Safe and it was funded by Global Changemakers.

The first session of the workshop included awareness on hygiene. The road that led to the workshop stage from the entrance of the brothel was filled with garbage. Rijve Arefin explained the importance of maintaining hygiene and not to throw garbage on the road.

In the second session, Shomy Hasan Chowdhury talked about menstrual hygiene. The sex-workers were encouraged to talk about menstruation, a natural part of the female body. They were assured that there was no need to feel ashamed of a natural process. Also, they were provided with free sanitary napkins and instructed not to

throw them out in the open after using.

Next, information regarding HIV, STDs were provided to the sex-workers. The risks of having unprotected sex, the importance of using condoms and symptoms of STDs and HIV were demonstrated to them. They were informed further about the risks of using unclean and used syringe and made aware of the fact that conceiving a child while having HIV would transmit the disease to the unborn child as well.

The special guest at the workshop, Former National Advisor, Food Safety Program of FAO-UN and Senior Assistant Director of Department of Fisheries, Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury, spoke about food protection. Nutrition is very important in fighting against disease. Hence, he advised them to eat healthy, keep the kitchen clean and

eat in a clean place. He also told them to boil their water and dishes and be aware in order to prevent any unwanted illness.

Along with these, pamphlets and posters were distributed that included six steps of washing hands properly.

In the process, the organisers had to make sure the sex-workers did not get bored. Few performances from the sex-workers were also encouraged to make sure they had a good time. They sang and danced and enjoyed themselves.

To organise a workshop inside a brothel was very challenging. One of the coordinators, Shomy Hasan Chowdhury says, "We found a local contact in Nazma Boarding Brothel and through him, we talked to their committee members. Convincing them was pretty tough. Arranging the whole programme, travelling to Mymensingh from Dhaka multiple times were even tougher. We needed to get permission from the District Commissioner of Mymensingh because without his consent we would not be able to get Police Protection. After struggling through a rigorous process we managed both."

It was a day long workshop and we had to come back to our regular lives, while they were still trapped in that cramped brothel. Many stories were left to be heard for another day. Therefore, more of such workshops are needed to be organised and attention to be paid