

"No Silence Please! This is a Human Library"

MUNIA ISLAM

Reading a story tucked in the pages of a book while sitting somewhere alone encased in yourself sounds easy, but, have you ever thought about the stories coming to life and the books nar-

Library' sounds out of the norm and often raises the question, "How on earth does it even work?" Well, to answer the question, The Human Library works in a similar fashion to how a traditional library works. However, in this case, the library dis-

sunny Saturday, three youngsters; Upoma Rashid, Mushfiquzzaman Khan Apurbo and Rafsanul Hoque Hridoy launched the first ever Human Library in Bangladesh. It was like any other Saturday here in Dhaka, but not for these three

librarians steady at their positions, all the while waiting for a few visitors to peek in. "We were expecting only a hundred people at max," says Upoma to the Daily Star. "First came in a few, then a few more and then, a huge gush of people almost in no time. We, honestly, weren't expecting this huge of a response. I remember asking Rafsan if we could leave it at that and sneak out through the back door. We were that overwhelmed!"

With ten books on the table, almost three hundred readers in a queue and a handful of librarians volunteering on the floor, the day turned out to be a bigger success than initially anticipated. People, irrespective of age, gender, values, and spheres of life, gathered around to take in this new perspective of a library. "What surprised us is that, the visitors were very tolerant and co-operative throughout the entire process. They bore with us understanding that it was our first time organising something new like The Human Library," says Apurbo.

The Human Library works as a tool for people to open up and talk to each other while sharing their experiences. It is mostly a functional platform that literally defines the saying, 'Don't judge a book by its cover'. With a person sitting right in front of you, telling their story with emotions in their eyes while directly looking into yours, blind judgment does not come easy. One of the main goals of The Human Library is to break stereotypes and help people understand perspectives more easily.

Upon asking what they wish to establish in Bangladesh, particularly through The Human Library, the trio responded with "an increased level of tolerance" without even thinking twice. With a goal to host The Human Library every other month, they are already working on their next launch. Hosting an event that brings no monetary profit for both the organisers and the participants, The Human Library Dhaka team is truly dedicated to promoting their hopes of establishing tolerance in our strictly fenced society.

When asked, "Out of all the things you could've done, why this? What was in it for you?", Upoma replied, "Even being the quirky and outgoing person that I am, I always had a communication barrier between me and my surroundings when it came to expressing emotions. I, probably, still don't have the guts to speak out about what I feel but watching these people showcase their life story in such a manner leaves me wanting to be more like them and someday, maybe not today, but someday, I will be like them: more expressive and more vocal about myself."

In a world of unsolicited Facebook statuses with the thirst for 'likes' and Instagram posts of what we had for lunch, The Human Library is a reminder of reality and a solution to real problems. In a society of "What will people think?" and judgment by appearance, The Human Library Dhaka is another stepping stone towards a more tolerant and accepting society.



PHOTO: AKIB ABDULLAH

rating their story in flesh?

The Human Library is an international organisation that first started in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2000 with the aim to break stereotypes and challenge prejudice against social contact among people. The term 'Human

courages silence and allows the reader to be a part of the story itself. The books are basically people with inspiring stories from all aspects of life putting their life up as a story for the readers to read (read 'hear'). On July 29, 2017, a bright and

young people. After months of planning and dedication, the gates of Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Bidyapeeth were finally open at 2:00 p.m., ready for readers to have their first go at The Human Library Dhaka. The books were up and ready at their tables,

OGGRO Ventures

Reconstructing the Identity of Bangladeshi Farmers

SANJIDA CHOWDHURY

"Agriculture is the heart of Bangladesh and farmers are the gems of this agricultural economy."

With this vision in mind, OGGRO Ventures started its journey in 2007 with the aim of redefining the identity of Bangladeshi farmers. "Shifting from economics to agriculture was not out of epiphany, it was a very constructive and calculative move," says the Chairman of OGGRO Ventures, Farzeen Ferdous Alam. Even though he pursued his Bachelors in Economics from the University of Dhaka, he prefers himself to be recognised as a farmer.

The initial days of OGGRO Ventures were different. Ten years ago, a bunch of teenagers decided to hold a cleaning programme called 'Stand up, Clean up'. Starting from Dhanmondi's road 27 up to road 6/A, these enthusiastic youths dressed the long path with a clean and fresh look. With the progress of time, OGGRO Ventures started conducting several awareness building programmes in various rural areas of Bangladesh, taking the help of dedicated international aids. In the process, Alam came to a close proximity with the rural people of Bangladesh and their daily lifestyle. While



Farzeen Ferdous Alam

reminding the early days of the organisation, Alam mentions that his mother, Dr. Ferdousi Begum, a researcher on Genetic Engineering, acted as a great influence. He, along with his mother, scrutinised the rural life of the farmers and understood that our agricultural sector was in a dire need of technological innovation and revolution.

Having identified the root of this discrepancy, OGGRO Ventures decided to

stand beside the poor farmers. OGGRO Ventures, along with its three subsidiaries, has been providing fruitful incentives to the farmers, hoping to boost our economy. Ferdous Biotech is one of the subsidiaries that works for technological innovation regarding seeds, chemicals and production. It is the first private biotech company in Bangladesh. By using tissue culture, Ferdous Biotech is producing good quality potato seeds in its own laboratory located in Savar, Dhaka. After identifying the best quality potato, it is rapidly multiplied in the laboratory using tissue culture. This new innova-

tion helps the farmers to get rid of the damage of vegetable propagation and degeneration. Not only this, while making plantlets of the seeds, they are made virus resistant in order to facilitate the farmers with a good yield. This is how Ferdous Biotech creates five hundred thousand plantlets in the laboratory each year. As a result, this reduces the pressure on import of seeds from other countries. Ferdous Biotech, along with producing virus resistant seeds, has signed a technical co-operation with the largest biotech company in Southern China.

The two other subsidiaries of this venture, Oggro Crops and Oggro Dairy, serve the customers with absolute transparency and authenticity. Oggro Crops buys the final product from the very farmers who initially bought seeds from Ferdous Biotech. By doing so, Oggro Crops can make the farmers profit more as the harvest produced is then exported to Nepal, Brunei, Oman and Malaysia. In addition to that, to facilitate the farmers with the best advice about production, they are provided with a 24-hour hotline service called 'Farmers' Academy'.

Oggro Dairy not only focuses on providing pure milk, but also nurtures their cows with proper maintenance. They make sure consumers' satisfaction by eliminating any chances of bacteria attack. Oggro Dairy has benefited from expert training from PUM Netherlands, a programme supported by the Government of Netherlands.

OGGRO Ventures concentrates upon the agricultural sector in order to bring a more sustainable and efficient solution to the farmers. In a resourceful country like Bangladesh, food security should not be an obstacle to enhance its economy. With this very goal, OGGRO Ventures hopes to be the biggest agricultural organisation of Bangladesh one day.



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1. 8th Model Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) 2017 in Myanmar



Applications are open for the 8th Model Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) taking place 15-20 November, 2017, in Yangon and Naypyidaw, Myanmar. University students from all levels (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral) and all disciplines, between the ages of 18-30, can apply for this programme. Deadline: September 3, 2017 | Funding: Partially Funded

2. Resilience Journalism Fellowship 2017 in New York, USA

The programme, scheduled for Oct. 22-27, up to 15 journalists will gather in New York City for six days of study and discussion as part of the new Resilience Journalism Fellowship at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism. Deadline: August 31, 2017 | Funding: Fully Funded

3. Paid Internship Opportunity at UNSSC HQ in Italy



UNSSC are seeking to offer UN system organisations and staff innovative and cost-effective solutions to support staff development and increasing learning, management and communication competencies and organisational capabilities. Deadline: September 10, 2017 | Funding: Monthly Stipend 450€

4. Czech Republic Government Scholarship 2018



The Government of the Czech Republic offers the framework of its Foreign Development Assistance in support of the study of foreign nationals from developing countries at public institutions of higher education in the Czech Republic. Deadline: Ongoing | Funding Type: Full Scholarship

5. Korean Government Scholarship 2017



Korean Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning, offers a customised master's and doctoral degree programme for government officials in the IT fields of developing countries. Deadline: September 20, 2017 | Funding Type: Full Scholarship

Take control of Social Media

SIHINTA SABEEN SHEMBIL

The internet is like the ocean: deep and fascinating, but also overwhelming. Like the ocean, the internet has many hidden treasures along with unnecessary elements. Nowadays, we are immersed in adoring cute cat-videos or 'liking' our friend's selfies. We also get into debates regarding President Donald Trump's tweets, and fancy the recent fashion of the Kardashians on Instagram. It seems as such that, most of us cannot declutch ourselves from the grasp of the World Wide Web, especially when depending upon groups, chats and event pages of the different social media platforms for both academic and entertainment purposes.

The social media and the internet may have become a necessary part of our lives, however, that does not mean we cannot make small changes to minimize its distractions and maximize our productivity. Do you wish to know how? Here are a few tips:

1. Do not wake-up and log-in instantly:

It is advised to not get indulged into stress during the first ten minutes after waking-up. These ten minutes help set your mood for the rest of the day. An excessive amount of notifications could trigger anxiety. So, the best choice is to not check your phone, or laptop, until you have

woken up, groomed yourself, and had breakfast.

2. Switch off those notifications!:

There is no need to be constantly bombarded by the notification sounds of your social media apps. Simply, turn the notifi-

ications off to stop you from becoming side-tracked and distracted throughout the day.

3. Un-follow to take the lead: The social media feed is designed to be addictive, to have us scrolling on and on for hours. However, you have the power to reduce the fruitless information of your newsfeed by simply un-following un-

cessary pages. By choosing what you want to see and what you do not, you end up creating a newsfeed that is much more motivational and pedagogical. The hours that you spend now scrolling through your social media feed lead you to more

productivity and inspiration.

4. A mini "to-do" list to reach your goal!:

Many a times, we log onto Facebook or Youtube in order to complete an important task. However, after logging-in, we wander and wander until we wonder, "What was it that I was actually supposed to do?" To prevent such a scenario, sim-

ply, jot down a list of the tasks you need to do on a piece of paper and then log-in. Make sure you cross-off that list before allowing yourself to wander and ponder over other tasks.

5. Get into action:

We passively consume numerous information on a daily basis through the internet. There are two sides of this coin: consuming the useless content and forgetting the useful content. While surfing, ask yourself, "Can this information be incorporated into my lifestyle or be added to my Curriculum Vitae?" If the answer is a 'No', then delete that link. If the answer is a 'Yes', make sure you do put it into action. For example, if you read about the benefits of exercising, then do try working-out, or, if you watch tutorials on video-editing, then why not edit some videos?

The old cliché "Time is valuable" still stands true to this day. How you spend your time at the present would definitely affect your future to a great extent. We are lucky to be alive during a period where we have unlimited access to knowledge and opportunities. It is your responsibility to ensure that you make the most of it and not let your chances whiter away. Follow these simple tips provided above for better productivity, better focus, and ultimately, a better you. Take control of social media and do not let it control you.

