

NASIR ALI MAMUN

Discusses Photography

Nasir Ali Mamun is a prominent portrait photographer whose pictures revolve around important personalities and celebrities of this country. He has extensively worked in the black-and-white analogue media, contributed to the development of portrait photography in Bangladesh, and has over 40 solo exhibitions and several photobooks under his name. He is a recipient of this year's The Daily Star-Standard Chartered Bank's 'Celebrating Life Lifetime Achievement Award' in Photography. In this exclusive interview, Nasir Ali Mamun talks about the development of his career and preferences in photography.



My first attempt at photography began when I used to live in Green Road, where there was a studio named Studio Neha. I had good connection with the people there and at times they used to lend me a 120 Box Camera. Back then I didn't know about developing films or printing photographs. I had to slowly learn photography myself, but the lack of a dark room made photo development quite difficult. Thus, I used the bathroom at my home as a dark room by covering the windows with newspapers. In the same plate that I ate from, I filled chemicals to develop films, and despite never smoking, I used to light cigarettes to see the development of the black and white films. Back then I also used a photographic fixer called Hypo, which handled the permanent negative in pictures. Nothing could describe the joy I felt when I saw that the pictures came out properly!

When I was 11 years old, I grew this admiration and respect for famous people. Every day, before my father could get his hands on the newspaper, I used to cut off the newsprint picture of the famous celebrities, writers and political personalities. Even after being constantly

reprimanded by my father, that habit of mine never stopped, and only fueled my obsession for pictures of famous people further. I used to look at those pictures and wonder what techniques those photographers used to take the pictures. Afterwards, in 1972, I decided to introduce portrait photography in this country.

When it comes to my own style of portrait photography, controlling the light and shadow is of paramount importance. Whenever I go to someone's home to take their picture, I ensure that the windows and doors are closed shut and the lights are turned off. Then I make sure that the person is sitting in the perfect position, preferably besides the windows or doors, and then manage the shadow from there. A lot of people ask me how I take such dark photos without a studio. The truth is, I don't use an artificial studio camera or apply flash photography. I prefer using the natural light. In a way, I steal the rays of the sun and place them on famous people. I try to bring life into my photography using the light from nature.

Seeing the photographs of influential people such as Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein and

Rabindranath Tagore have always inspired me. Marx in specific have been a huge source of inspiration for me. I would say I have been quite successful in capturing many important people in the lens of my camera. I have taken pictures of Mother Teresa, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mawlana Bhashani, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, General Muahammad Ataul Gani Osmani, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jasimuddin, Kazi Abul Kashem, Günter Grass, and many more prominent personalities. I have gained deep friendship with many of them. I am indebted to them and whenever I look at their pictures I feel like they will come to life and ask me to take their photographs once again.

Besides portrait photography I have other interests as well, such as collecting autographs, writings and letters. I also encourage people to draw pictures and I have collected thousands of drawings by famous people. I even had exhibitions feature my private collection of drawings.

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Interviewed by Abid Hossain Khan
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