



COURTESY: PATHSHALA

Photography enters a new frame at Pathshala

In conversation with Tanvir Murad Topu

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After successfully training photographers and photography enthusiasts over the last 19 years, Pathshala South Asian Media Institute continues to move forward in shaping the future generation of creative minds. Most recently, they have announced an affiliation with the University of Dhaka (DU), making Pathshala the first institute in South Asia to provide an undergraduate degree programme in Photography; they have enrolled students for the undergraduate and postgraduate diploma programme starting this year.

We spoke with Tanvir Murad Topu, Head of Photography and faculty member at Pathshala, to learn more about this new opportunity for photography enthusiasts.

Tell us about the degrees in offer.

Topu: Through this affiliation we are providing two new programmes: the B.S.S. in Photography and the Post Graduate Diploma in Film & Television. The Bachelor's in Photography is particularly significant because this will be the only programme in South Asia to offer an undergraduate degree in photography. The programme will fall under the Faculty of Social Sciences and students will receive a certificate from DU.

How did the initial idea come about of an academic affiliation with DU?

Topu: When Pathshala was formed almost two decades ago, it was to provide photographers an opportunity to attain technical skills in the field of photography. We have been doing that with various courses in offer, as well as with the professional programmes available for students. But we reached a point where we wanted to do more than just create professionals. We have exchange programmes with nine different universities around the world, including in India, Germany, Australia, and Norway. We realised that in the South Asia region, there is no university that provides an actual undergraduate degree on photography. So we decided to obtain an academic accreditation. After enquiring into options like National University, Bangladesh Open University and

even private universities under UGC regulations, we thought, why not DU? It is the most prestigious university in our country. We sent in a formal proposal along with a syllabus for the entire undergraduate programme. And after several steps in the last couple of years, we are now officially the first institute in South Asia to provide a B.S.S. in Photography.

Can you give us a breakdown of both the programmes?

Topu: The undergraduate programme spans over eight semesters with a total of 128 credits. Like other DU departments, every semester will have four courses, each of which will hold four credits. Anyone who has completed HSC or A Level is eligible to apply as long as they



meet the minimum requirements of a minimum GPA of 2.5 in SSC/O Level and HSC/A Level. The post graduate diploma programme is 18 months long with three semesters and 15 courses. The candidate must have a Bachelor degree from any discipline with a minimum GPA of 2.5 in SSC, HSC, and undergraduate levels.

What is the admission process like?

Topu: The admission process consists of a 100-mark exam, where 75 marks cover the written part and 25 marks is for the portfolio/viva round. The written part is designed to match other DU admission exams. There are four sections that include 20 marks for Bangla, 20 marks

for English, 10 marks for General Mathematics, and 25 marks for Photography & Literature. The students who pass the written exam will go through the portfolio/viva round where the final selection will be made. This year we had 25 seats for both our undergraduate and post graduate diploma programmes.

In what ways would you say the undergraduate degree programme is different from the Professional Program in Photography?

Topu: The Professional Program in photography at Pathshala is 3-year long course that is more focused on training students to apply their skills practically. This is a good choice for any photography enthusiast wanting to acquire technical skills or work in the field as a professional.

The B.S.S. in Photography will provide the students with not only the option to explore any field of photography, but because they will be graduating with an academic degree, they can use it to work in a number of professions. We hope to see our graduates becoming BCS cadres or take up top-level decision-making roles in the workforce. We are still working on ways of improving our syllabus and facilities to bring in interested employers and create a job market for our students.

Since only the most recent high-school graduates are eligible to apply for the B.S.S. in Photography, do you have provision for older people who might also want a degree in photography?

Topu: We are aware of this and trying to figure out how to make the programme available for older candidates. We are considering affiliating with Bangladesh Open University or National University, as I've mentioned, neither of which have an age limit criteria for application. Until then the option for the Professional Program for photography is still available for all students. We also have fully-funded exchange programmes, where our brightest students can go to a foreign university and work for an entire semester.

To find out more about Pathshala and its programmes, visit www.pathshala.org