

After page 4

While the Bangladesh government has established a Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, independent of the international funding it has access to, recent research shows that rural families in the country are spending an average of USD two billion a year due to climate change. On the other hand, the national budget allocated for climate change in rural areas last year was USD 1.46 billion and international funding was a further USD 154 million, according to a study by the International Institute for Environment and Development. This money is spent on repairing damaged homes or raising houses above flood levels—money diverted from spending on basic needs such as food, health, and education, or being borrowed at high interest rates from moneylenders and pushing these families in further debt.

Pages upon pages could be written on the impacts of climate change on Bangla-



Students protesting in Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

desh, but the fact is the science is already there and it shows that we really did not contribute much to this crisis. Yet, the burden of the climate crisis is disproportionately on our shoulders. For Bangladesh, it is yet another wake up call to try and find localised solutions to a crisis essentially fueled by the West and the developed world.

It is essentially the poor, the indigenous communities, and those who are forced

to leave places where rising temperatures and sea levels have already begun to affect life, that will have to bear the brunt of the crisis. It is also the youth and children of the country who face a future in an uninhabitable planet who are now taking on the fight. While they have risen to the occasion quite magnificently, it is difficult to predict what the movement will boil down to.



"I plastic wrap the books after reading them to protect them from tanning and edge-wear," says Minhaz.

PHOTO: MINHAZ MUHAMMAD

After page 3

"What is the book, what parts of it are understood to be important now, how do we think its physical form may become important to readers or scholars in the future. There are often many treatments one could do, so it is important to choose the one that suits the circumstances. In libraries and archives, we like to preserve evidence of past use and provenance, and damage may be part of the history of the object. If an item's damaged state leaves it unsafe to handle, then we would have to address it in some way, because our collections are held so that they can be used by researchers. Working in an institutional conservation lab, one of the benefits as a conservator is the dialogue with curators and sometimes faculty that takes place in selecting the best treatment option with these considerations in mind."

However, Dr Islam stresses that, "There is a serious dearth of modern conservation and preservation practices among those who store, sell, and work with books in Bangladesh. Very few have proper primary and secondary knowledge of how to sustain books."

"No academic institution in Bangladesh

has sufficient manpower to ensure proper maintenance of books, neither do they offer proper training or academic education on the same to students. Out of the 45 institutions in Bangladesh, only four universities teach library and information science. Some journalism and mass communication programmes may teach binding and printing. But even among them, conservation and preservation are confined within one or two courses; they are yet to be developed as a separate discipline with well-thought out course outlines."

"There isn't enough leadership and coordination in the field," he insists. "For instance, the Bangladesh National Archives and the National Library, with their huge store of materials, could easily offer training in these topics. DU could be offering more seminars or symposia on the topic. The government could allocate more funding for conservation measures out of its development initiatives, and do a better job of raising public awareness. What we need is access to and free flow of information regarding the conservation of our cultural heritage."

Book preservation at home

Expensive equipment and academic training aren't the only avenues to taking care of books, though. In personal collections across this country and others, book-lovers have found ways to connect emotionally with the inhabitants of their shelves, and to preserve them through easy, inexpensive means.

Minhaz Muhammad, a university student who loves to collect books, has learned how to handle them better from working at Charcha bookstore in Mohammadpur. "Apparently the weather of Bangladesh is not suitable for acid-free paper. So the pages will get yellowed out eventually. One thing that I do now to save them from tanning and edge-wear is plastic wrap the books after I'm done reading them."

"The biggest way I take care of books is in the way I read them," says Susie Chavez, a graduate of history and literature from Columbia University and a former classmate of mine. "Unless they have a lay-flat binding, my book will never be

opened all the way. I hold them open at about 70 degrees. When I need more, I pinch the book just past the spine to keep it from cracking. I press curved covers back into shape under other books after I read them, and glue down the edges and corners that—unless you're superhuman or don't take the book anywhere—will never stay perfect."

But not every book is the same. Susie points out how some mass market paperbacks and beach reads are generally meant to be used rather carelessly, or even just once before they fall apart in your hands and into the trash can. Textbooks sit in the library or the classroom, or accompany students through transits and hours of studying and annotating. But even these heavy-duty usages can be economised—books can be positioned on the flat side of a school bag, can be pulled out holding the middle of the spine rather than the top, and the curves and twists to the book's shape can be evened out as soon as they occur.

"But you also have your favourite book," Susie points out. "The one someone gave you as a kid and you can't seem to find anywhere; the one that you treat more and more carefully as each reread makes the covers and spine a little weaker. That's the one you want to keep and share with your kids, and you learned to love that book because of the ones your mom, or maybe your grandma, loved as kids. You watched them take these heirlooms down from shelves, lovingly caressing the spine before pulling it and you into their lap to read."

And somehow, knowing how important, how special and loved, that book was to them, it felt special to you. That's a book you're going to keep—even if you hated it—and share with your kids alongside your favourite book. Through love and preservation, that book becomes a vessel through which to tell a different story than the one on its pages; a story generations in the making that, if you, too, can keep it safe, will go on being written long after you."

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