

“Bhalo koreh pora lekha koro!”

(Study Hard!)

By: Rimon Hossain

“Bhalo koreh pora lekha koro.” The last words my Uncle uttered on his deathbed in Comilla, Bangladesh, are echoed in my Mother’s daily words through the phone. Far away from home, while I tend to my studies, this well-wishing phrase has become my purpose.

My earliest memories of life in America, take me back to an empty two-bedroom apartment; where a lack of furniture was compensated by standing towers of luggage, still carrying the aroma of my distant Motherland. Forever awaiting my Father’s return home from long shifts at work: my Mother, two younger brothers and I would grow accustomed to a life of waiting.

In our neighborhood of Little Bangladesh in Koreatown, Los Angeles, the crime rate and the sheer fact that 85% of this growing immigrant population were blue-collar workers living near the poverty line, prevailed as the image of the Los Angeles Bengali community as a whole. Gang violence and disappearances of Bengali youth haunted my parents and reminded me of the fragility of this immigrant existence. Still, in the back of my mind, the stories of my relatives and how they bettered their condition through education, never left my mind.

Once the same work ethic my parents instilled in me got me to UC Berkeley, I was exposed to even more disciplines while realizing that every semester, my interests were changing. I would never have imagined learning about Bengal's decline from the Battle of Polashi in an Upper Division History Seminar, nor about the influence eight hundred years of Muslim Rule had on Spain in my Near Eastern Studies Class. Learning about International Relations, History and Political Economy even pushed me to pursue coursework in Arabic and Bengali.

I went from being the silent student in class Freshman Year, to leading not only the World News Section in our Campuses' Premier Nonpartisan Political Journal, but starting my own Publication—the Bengal Gazette.

Named after the first newspaper in South Asia in 1780, the Bengal Gazette is a UC Berkeley student publication covering all matters related to Bengal, including its history, politics, culture, etc. I see this publication as testament to my roots and the ultimate test of my learnings at UC Berkeley. As a personal duty, I attempt to unite all those interested in Bengal and its rich history, towards a goal of establishing a tradition of discussion and scholarship regarding our peoples' diaspora, traditions and culture. This idea stemmed from my senior thesis regarding Rohingya Resettlement in not just Bangladesh but in different parts of the world such as the

Middle East, Ireland and the US. Amidst all my discussion with peers at Berkeley regarding the Rohingya crisis, I realized they each were brimming with knowledge and had something to say, which triggered my impulse as an Editor to invite them to write on a platform for everyone to take part in and learn from.

I hope to use the scholarship to fund the first issue of the Bengal Gazette , which will be launched in April 2019. The Bengal Gazette will serve as a platform for the narratives and discussions of Bengali UC Berkeley students in future generations, who will continue the footprint of the Bengal Gazette on the UC Berkeley campus community.

“Bhalo koreh pora lekha koro.” The last time I heard this was on a visit to Bangladesh last January with my Father. Strutting through the patty fields with matching suits and having just completed our Umrah pilgrimage, my father stops in his tracks to shout out to someone working in the sugar cane fields, “Is that Shimon?!”

Turns out Shimon and my Father went to elementary school together, until third grade where Shimon’s father passed away, forcing Shimon to assume his Father’s role as a day laborer.

Whether it was pure chance or destiny, my Father had the means and circumstances to pursue his education along with his eleven brothers and sisters. In the end, it was grit. Their desire to receive an education and choose professions that they would carry out throughout their lives to feed their families, is why my extended family is now living in America as citizens.

“Bhalo koreh pora lekha koro.” I’m saying this, now. Behind a microphone, addressing an audience of over a hundred schoolchildren living in my father’s village of Sultanpur in Comilla, Bangladesh. The occasion is a scholarship ceremony in the name of my grandfather, Kashem Ali, who was the first person from Sultanpur to receive an education, followed by his eleven children. All of whom, were born in this village I was delivering a speech in. My father told me to give my speech in English, but I was insistent on telling my Grandfather’s story in Bengali and why without his perseverance towards education, I would not be living the life I live as a Bangladeshi-American Berkeley student.

My grandfather’s father was a day laborer who grew sugar cane, like his father and his grandfather before him. However, it only took one generation of one person deciding to get educated, to compel the next generation to settle abroad - in turn, compelling my generation to give back.

“Education is the backbone of our nation,” was the only thing I said in English in this speech. As it holds true for any nation, the social, physical and mental wellbeing of any individual or community can only be improved through sound education and community. As a social good, education promotes mental and physical wellbeing as it allows individuals to both shape their careers and stimulate their minds. In investing in our children, whether it be in their early childhood education or providing them with a foundation for collegiate education, the

long-term results are guaranteed to line the children of tomorrow up for an upward trajectory in our global economy.

In the end, I can only promise myself to give cheerfully and accept gratefully, knowing that there is no greater deed or satisfaction in life than knowing you've made a difference in someone else's life.