

### **Naima- a girl just like the meaning of her name 'benevolent'**

My mother, me and my elder brother live together in a small house my father left when he died a few years ago. My name is Jannatul Naima and I am a student of Asian University for Women (AUW). Even a few months back this very sentence of getting admitted into a higher educational institution would seem utterly unrealistic. I had no idea where to go or what to do after completing HSC examination. I knew this much that my mother cannot afford to pay for my university application fee, let alone send me to attend a university admission test away from home. I was left with no option but to look for a degree college near home. Everything seemed blurry at that time. And yet, it was not something new for me.

We live in a joint family with three of our uncles and their wives and children. Growing up, I saw my father as a patient of psychological illness. He was always under medication. Me and my elder brother never felt the affection of a father. It was my mother who earned for our family and paid for my father's treatment. She took a job as a teacher under BRAC's education program. With her limited income, we could only manage the basics; two dresses on two Eid festivals only, fees of our schools and private tutors, medicine for my father and that was it. It was not enough. But my mother was trying her best. I knew this much. At one point, my brother started a part-time job and I started giving tuitions to the neighboring primary school girls. It was difficult still to continue concentrating on our study with so many things on mind. I started getting inattentive as a student. My mother, however, never gave up on us. She used to sit in front of us till late night even after doing most of the household chores of such a big family, just to ensure we do not lose our focus.

Days were passing by. My brother and I were somehow managing everything on our own, with my mother taking care of our father. And then one day, we found out my father had cancer. It took me days to digest this uncanny truth. My mother poured all her savings on his treatment. We even went to a local political leader for financial help. Later on, they bore all his medical expenses. But, alas, the disease was incurable. He died. I was only thirteen. My mother was left with no one but us.

Our lives changed after that. But among everything, my mother made sure we continue schooling. Besides teaching, she started sewing cloths for others. All her efforts had one goal only; to educate us and make us independent. Despite all the hardship as a single mother, she never thought of marrying me off. She is a very strong woman. She has a strong sense of conscience. Her strength radiates the kind of energy I needed most after I lost my father. I was in class nine when I realized how ardently my mother feels about our education. To be honest, from then on, I genuinely got serious about my study.

After finishing school, I got admitted into a local intermediate college. It was ok being there. But the teachers were mostly rude, especially female teachers. I never really enjoyed attending classes, to be true. Rather I loved to go to a private tutor who was really nice to us and sometimes invested extra time if we did not understand a particular topic of accounting. After finishing my own tuition, I used to teach school children and dreamt it would have been really nice if I could choose teaching as a profession.

All my efforts went in vain, however. After I passed HSC, I was hoping to get admitted into an admission coaching center. But there was no coaching center in our locality. We had to travel to Chittagong to attend coaching. It was a three-hour long journey from Raozan to Chittagong. The transportation cost was a big factor. Distance was another. Consequence- I could not afford it. It was such a depressing phase of my small life. All of a sudden, one day, I got a call from my college principal. My life has changed after I listened to him.

The news of Asian University for Women (AUW) brought a glimpse of hope. And, such a blissful moment it was when I learned that I was selected. All my broken hopes got pieced together, all over again. It was time to prepare myself for the journey ahead. This was not a smooth process though. It took me and my mother days to get the medical certificates; a mandatory requirement for admission. We used to travel to Chittagong every morning and wait until late night to convince government doctors. The admission process was getting delayed. I was scared to death thinking about the admission deadline. Though, at last, everything was sorted out. I made my first move outside Kadalpur.

Today, I dream of inspiring many others like me. I want to become a teacher in my college. I believe I can become a role model in my community. My neighbors, cousins, college and school friends are already very intrigued to see me do so well. Now, they too want to pursue higher education. It is my ardent wish to help them, guide them towards the right direction. My first step as a teacher would be to open a library and develop the practice of reading books out of syllabus among students. I can only wonder how wonderful it would be if my idea comes alive.



Picture 1: Jannatul Naima, standing in front of her college in Kadalpur. Naima loves gardening and painting.

### About the author

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