



# HYPHEN

## At the Crossroads

ABU HAQUE

The diaspora community occupies a space that is not only ambiguous but also a liminal space between the one they left behind and the one they live in, which Bhabha (1990) called the ‘third space.’ Foucault (1986) would identify this as an in-between space, a form of ‘other spaces’ belonging to neither utopias nor heterotopias<sup>1</sup>—spaces that provide a mixed experience, such as a mirror. It is not a utopia, as you can touch the mirror; therefore, it is real. However, the

space is not quite real either, as when you look at your reflection in the mirror, you see yourself where you do not exist. It has elements of both real and unreal at the same time; therefore, it is a mixed experience.

This ambiguous mental space also relates to what Freud called memory residues (2010), as it appeals to memory whenever it gets an opportunity. Sometimes it’s a smell, or just the aura of a place, at other times it’s an uncan-

ny resemblance of a familiar view or sound that triggers the memory residue to resurface and they are immediately transferred over to another space and time. The transfer is immediate and it feels very real. It transcends existing space-time to elevate them into that third space—a space of confusion and ambiguity.

How do borders manifest in the psyche of the diaspora? How do they affect their agency? Do they

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<sup>1</sup> Utopias are imaginary sites, not real places, but society cannot function with utopias. In contrast, heterotopias are places where utopias are acted upon, such as cemeteries, hospitals, theatres, gardens, etc. However, they take quite varied forms, there are no universal forms of heterotopias. Some spaces represent both utopias (the imaginary) and heterotopias (the real)—Foucault identified them as other spaces (Foucault, 1986).

Photos by Author



find solace in the newly discovered, much sought-after land, or do they regret their decision to migrate to an alien land where they have settled down anyway, as they have reached the point of no return? How do they maneuver through this mental dilemma while at the same time staying connected to the homeland through transnational ties?

The question about how borders may manifest in the imagination of the hyphenated identities demands proper scrutiny, as in reality, no natural boundaries exist between any two countries. What divides is an imaginary line put up in place through a political construct based on the imagination of a people (Anderson, 2006; Kohn, 2017; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992). What is the process of this transition from the mental to the physical?

Moreover, although imaginary, these borders are manifested through maps and passports, which also instill a certain sense of citizenry among us. However, they are the tools of power and control that privilege the strong and discriminate against the weak. The discretionary power is exercised through various state apparatuses (Althusser, 1970). These boundaries exist as topographical illusions, maintained only through the discursive practices of power and manifest through various cultural signs and symbols such as a flag, or icon such as the Statue of Liberty.

Who or what do we refer to as hyphens? This term is generally used to identify people who belong to more than one sociocultural group. Nonetheless, we want to expand the definition to include other kinds of hyphenated ideas, including but not limited to belief, religion, politics, space, etc. By definition, diaspora communities fall into this category, as they are in

constant conflict with themselves and their space being both an outsider and an insider. Their desire toward a more meaningful contribution and be a part of the greater society is severed through this disconnect. This isolation seems impenetrable and almost impossible for them to break free. The inability to speak their minds and the unbearable burden of this detachment from a world they now call home make the wandering minds question their position in the construction of nationhood.

But by now, as they have moved on, there is also a general disconnect between them and the people and culture of their country of origin. Therefore, the space they are stuck in between is an ambiguous one, they are at a crossroads and constantly searching for a position that would resolve this ambiguity and contradiction.

Meanwhile, the lack of support and understanding from the dominant culture, often accompanied by misconceptions and stereotypes about the incoming cultures, yields mistrust and hostility toward the immigrants. This has also been on the rise, as recent polls show that perceptions about immigrants are changing, where Canadians feel more anxious about immigration and believe newcomers and refugees have been given too much attention, and that asylum seekers receive too many benefits (Thurton, 2024). Standing at a crucial juncture of a potential socio-cultural shift, we welcome any discussion that inspires debate and challenges the validity of the existing system of knowledge production. ■

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SKETCH: KAUSHIK SARKER

# Rethinking Diplomacy: Bangladesh-India

TASLIM CHOWDHURY

With the recent liberation of Bangladesh, from an authoritarian government, and the bombardment of propaganda from India regarding the mistreatment of minorities in Bangladesh, it is now more important ever to speak about Bangladesh's relationship with India.

During the original liberation war the Bengali identity is what everyone was fighting for. The people of Bangladesh (then-East Pakistan) were not allowed to govern Pakistan, as we were seen as lesser than the Pakistanis. An election of Pakistan, which Mujib won fairly, was overturned by the Pakistani military. This is the reason why Bengalis of Pakistan revolted, and with the help of India, were liberated (for the first time).

This assistance from India was required for Bangladesh to be liberated, but this (for most Indians) means we should be forever indebted to them. Bengalis fought for our freedom and won; this can not be taken from us. Bangladesh does not belong to India, just as it no longer belongs to Pakistan.

After the liberation of Bangladesh, Mujib tried to form a single party system. This was inspired by China's single party system which Mujib saw as efficient, and probably believed it was required for Bangladesh to start its development. This is obviously not a democratic way to govern, and was one of the main reasons why he was assassinated on August 25, 1975.

Two years after Mujib's death, Zia took power. He reversed the one party

system, started moving away from a relationship with India, and allowed those who opposed the liberation war to start their political journey in the newly founded Bangladesh.

I recently found out that identifying as Bengali or Bangladeshi has political implications. This is because under Mujib we identified as Bengalis an ethnic race, whilst Zia realised that Bengalis are not the only ethnicity in Bangladesh. Bangladesh also contains minorities such as Santals, Garos, Manipuris and Chakmas. He created the Bangladeshi national identity. This new identity separates us from the Bengalis of West Bengal (now part of India). Even though we share the same language and culture, we are separated by a border created by the British to accommodate the Muslim dream of a separate Muslim nation.

This new identity isolated the non-Muslim population. During the Pakistani reign, the army used the Bengali identity and made it synonymous with the Hindu religion. This, along with the fact that Zia also added "Bismillahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim" ("In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful") into the preamble of the constitution, could be a reason why

non-Muslims, particularly the Hindu community, felt isolated. Although Zia did not instate Islam as the national religion, it could be argued that he laid the foundation for it.

Zia himself was assassinated on the 29th of May, 1981. He was able to develop Bangladesh by focusing on population control, food production, and adult education, all of which are required for a developing country.

Now the founding members of Bangladesh's two major parties are assassinated, and many years later the wife of Zia, Khaleda Zia, and the daughter of Sheik Mujibur Rahman, Sheik Hasina, would take power of their respective parties. Khaleda would follow her husband's anti-India policies, even if it came at a cost to Bangladesh, and Hasina would follow the policies of her father's pro-India policies, even if it came at the cost of Bangladesh.

It is not possible for Bangladesh to develop further with the above policies. Bangladesh needs a Bangladesh first policy. We need to work with India and provide solutions, which would be mutually beneficial to both countries. ■



PHOTO: RASHID TALUKDER



Baba

“ I drew and painted these pieces at different times and phases of my life. There were times I wanted to focus on realism, at times, I felt inclined toward abstract art, and even an attachment to comic-style drawings.

## RAIENA'S WORK



Dadu

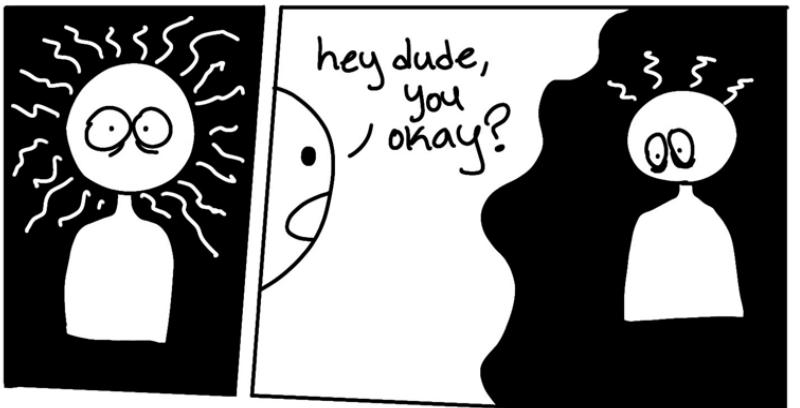


Time Regret

# WORLD OF ART

All of these represent a part of me, as the artistic mind continues to grow when it comes to being curious with different mediums of self expression. I am still bouncing between different art styles, as life does not stay still and neither does creativity."

-RAIENA HAQUE



School Stress

"SCHOOL STRESS"

R.H. 10.20.23

# The Path of the Pen

SAMIHA SANJIDA

"How long have you been in this library?" Anwar places his hands on his hips and opens his mouth in preparation to give me another one of his lectures; I shush him before he can go on a tirade. Quieter, he says, "I've been looking everywhere for you. What are you even reading about?"

I close my laptop, shutting away the job application. "I'm just reading about...writing. I'm starting something new."

Anwar frowns—the same expression of curiosity I've known since childhood. His eyes are so handsome that I want to write a story about him. But how could I ever capture everything that's wonderful about him? He deserves a love story that is new, rich, exciting.

"What are you writing about?"

I shrug. "I'm not sure yet. I think I need to search elsewhere."

Anwar eyes me. "And what exactly does that mean?"

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My first step is to leave the city. There are a million stories about rich, sad people living in cities, and a lot about poor, sad people living in cities, too. No, I decide to head to the forest. I had described my idea to my parents the night before. My mother had nodded blankly, and my father had laughed outright.

"Young people," he'd said, strutting around in his brand new suit. My mother had sat quietly at the table, scratching out our budget in her pocketbook.

I leave them to their red pages and receipts and walk. Past the suburbs are the fields. And past the fields are the woods. As I'm standing in front of the trees, gazing into the darkness of the

woods, Anwar catches up to me. "There—" he huffs, trying to catch his breath, "—is no way I'm letting you traverse around the woods all alone." I glare at Anwar. "I can take care of myself, thank you. I'm not some child stumbling about." Still, I let him follow me as I step into the tree line. The very air seems to expand around me, as if the forest is pulling me forward with an inhale. I pick a direction and walk, and something about it feels right.



Anwar hoists his backpack higher and pushes branches out of his face. "I'm not saying you're not capable. I'm saying I'm going to be here regardless." My breath snags and then my foot hits a root on the ground. Before I can slam into the ground, Anwar grabs my arm and pulls me to my feet. Stupid. I curse myself. After what I just said, too. I can see the same irony realized on his face. I try to thank him for catching me, but the words stick in my throat. Instead, I ignore the buzz of our skin touching and push past him, scampering to get ahead. The trees get taller as we venture deeper into the woods. The birds keep chirping, but they get higher and

higher until I can barely hear them. Branches that minutes before had smacked my face are now too high to see properly; only whirling trunks and gnarled roots are left to grab at my ankles and legs. We walk until the light begins to fade, but when I check my phone only two hours have passed, not enough time for the sun to fully set. Shadows wrap around the trees and the canopy overhead becomes a black mass like the night sky.

"Do you know where you're going?" Anwar asks from behind me.

"Of course I do," I lie. The ground smells like mulch, and I wrinkle my nose. "I'm going to find an original story."

"What does that even mean?" He sounds as incredulous as my parents, and I fight to bite back my anger. "You can just write a story."

I shake my head, but it's getting darker and I'm not sure he can even see me.

"No, I mean really original. Never told before."

Anwar sounds like he's almost laughing. "How do you suppose you'll do that? Every story has common roots."

I toss my backpack through the tightly spaced oaks, and then squeeze through as well. Thorns rip and tear at my clothes, scratching up my arms and legs. "See, that's the issue. Every story has been told. There's no suspense anymore. It's all just repetitive." Anwar accepts my help as I pull him through, his large shoulders scraping harshly. He winces as I brush off the grit. "So, what? You're out looking for new content?"

"Precisely. I just have to go find a story not told before." I spring over a low root. "It's gotta be out there somewhere. I mean, how did the first storytellers find their tales?"

Anwar sounds confused. "I assume they pulled from real life?"

I scoff. "Don't be ridiculous. No one wants to read about that."

I turn to look back at him and real-

ize it's so dark I can barely see him. Anwar is a vague smudge against the still air. Now that we're not talking, I notice the lack of birds. We're in total silence. The trees are in full bloom, but nothing makes sound. My breathing is loud and harsh.

Anwar takes my hand and squeezes. His thumb presses into the back of my hand. "Are you sure we're going the right way? It's gotten dark very quickly." He pauses. "Your hand... you're freezing."

I force myself to breathe deeply. "I think that means we're going the right way. There's no way to find what I'm looking for without things getting weird. I'm willing to deal with that."

We stop talking, listening to the trees around us rustle without wind. The sound is almost melodic, like each leaf is a voice in a chorus. I listen closer, almost convinced I'm hallucinating what I hear. "There's someone singing."

I lead us towards the sound, a quiet humming that steadily pervades the gloom. I'm blind in the darkness and the music is a trail of breadcrumbs. Then the branches part, and there is light. A cottage sits in a cradle of roots and trunks, like a lantern in a dark room fighting back the shadows. We stand at the edge of the light, and I only notice my body leaning forward when my chin dips. Anwar is still gripping my hand. We step forward together, one step, two, until, in a blink, we're at the front door.

Anwar looks at me. "You... you're pale. Your hair is losing its curl. What's happening?" My lips part of their own accord. "Nothing's wrong. We should rest here before we go on." The door swings open before the words are fully out of my mouth, as if I've spoken it into being. I drop

Anwar's hand and push before him, striding into the beckoning light of the doorway. Anwar chokes out a quiet half-word behind me, and then I'm inside.

The door opens to a small dining room. There is a small table in the center and some shelves on the walls, and every inch of the room is cluttered with plants and knickknacks. Pots and vases cover the floor; empty birdcages; dolls; piles of fabric; burlap sacks. The shelves are full of bottles and tubes, each filled with liquids with faded labels. The smell of food draws me deeper into the house.

Beyond the table is an open archway



barely visible for all the plants in front of it. I stick my head in and come upon a kitchen. An old woman leans over the sink, slowly scrubbing. She wears a colourful kameez, brown, and patterned with red flowers.

Before I can open my mouth, she speaks, "It isn't polite to walk into people's homes."

I rear back, apologies sputtering on my lips. She turns around slowly, as if every movement hurts her bones. Her face is deep-set with lines, like a grandmother. Anwar calls out from behind me, but she ignores him.

"It's alright," the old lady says. "The door was open, after all."

"Were you expecting us?" I feel as though I should have predicted the

sequence playing out— how many times have I seen this in movies? But the woman surprises me.

"Of course not. Why would I have been expecting you?" She shuffles towards me, waving me back into the sitting room as she follows. I hesitantly take a seat as she gestures to the table. Anwar remains standing as the woman takes the other chair. She doesn't even glance at him. "No, I think you were expecting me. You're looking for something."

I glance at Anwar. He flares his nose as he stares back, but I turn back to the woman. "Yes. I want to write a new story."

She smiles. "Of course you do. But you can't do that on your own."

"Will you help me?"

Anwar grabs my shoulder and hisses in my ear, "You don't even know who this lady is!"

The old woman smiles wide, wider than should be possible, until her smile becomes bared teeth. "I have invited you into my home. Into my world. You will treat me with respect." The walls shimmer for a moment, and the cozy home melts away to reveal a wasteland of corpses. We sit around the same table as before, but the ground underneath us turns into marsh, skeletal claws and grins peering up through the mud. The bones and flesh smell permeates the air, rotting and sickly and unforgettable. Something wet and sticky soaks into my shoes.

And then we're back.

I stare at the witch, cold even under the warm lights. She smiles again like a helpless grandmother.

"I'm sorry about my friend," I force out. "I'm the one who really needs help."

"Why?" she asks. I make a noise of confusion. "Why do you want this so bad? Who walks into the underworld to look for something as simple as a story?"

Behind me, Anwar draws in a shaky breath. I feel equally untethered. What barriers have we crossed? What have I dragged Anwar into?

I take a deep breath. She's right. Who would do something so crazy? I would. I have. "You misunderstand. I'm a writer; this is what I do. This is my only chance to do something great... There are no other options." The witch stares at me. "Except to be mediocre."

I scramble to my feet, the chair crashing into the ground behind me. "No. I won't do that." I'm distantly aware of Anwar backing away. I breathe quickly. I don't know what I've gotten into, but I do know one thing. "I'm not going to sit here and have someone tell me I won't be anything more than what I am now."

I think about my parents, old as the world yet only fifty. My mother's spine curves as she shuffles around the kitchen; my father's dissatisfaction with the world radiates off every sharp movement and scoff. And I think about the stagnation that bleeds from every crack in the roads of my town, seeping into the air and suffocating those aiming beyond the fields. It follows me no matter how far I go, choking me as the world stretches further and further from my grasp.

I stare the witch in her sallow eyes. "I've made it this far and I'm not turning around. You need to help me."

She grins her awful grin. "I don't need to do anything. But I like your conviction."

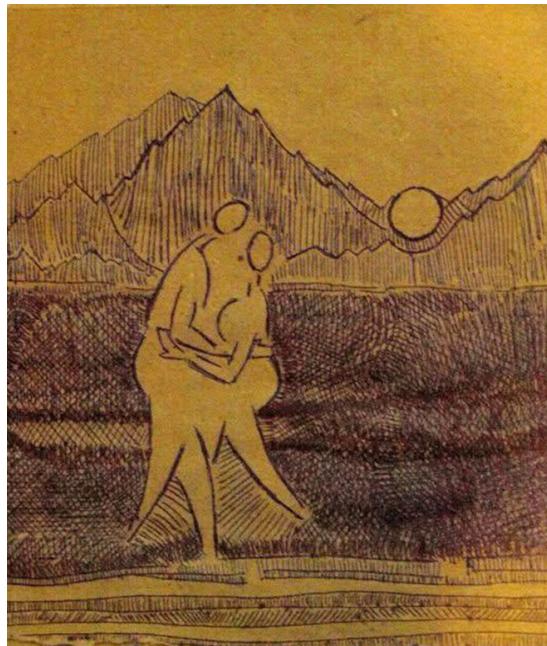
She waves her hand once and the floor opens up beneath us, and that grin glows from above as we fall into the dark.

I open my eyes, unaware that I'd even closed them, to a wide, frosty clearing. The birds are back, whistling softly. The grass is cold against my face. I turn my head to see pale hair splayed across sharp grass. When I lift my

head, the hair moves with me. I realize it's mine; the black has faded and all my curls are gone, replaced by stringy, placid streaks.

Anwar groans as he sits up. He looks disheveled but much the same. When our eyes meet, he pales.

"What the fuck was that?" Anwar's voice spikes with panic, louder than I've ever heard it. Even as a kid, he'd been prone to tears over anger, but now he gets to his feet and stomps towards me. "This is too far! What could possibly be worth walking into



hell and getting tossed into the nether for?"

I struggle to my feet. "I wouldn't expect you to understand. I need to prove myself good enough for—" I search for something to convey the tangled mess in my chest— "good enough to succeed in the world. I can't just coast by like everyone else. I don't have it as easy as that."

Anwar's face twists into an expression I can only describe as disgust. It punches the air out of my lungs like a physical blow. "Sometimes you can be so stuck up. Everyone else has just given up? Your life is so much harder? What self-absorbed sentiments. You think you're so much greater than everyone else, huh, and that's why you

have to go out and get yourself killed? Can't stand being like normal people." My nose burns. I realize I'm tearing up, and then I swallow it down. "You're not getting it. If I don't stand out, I'm not noticed. And if I'm noticed, I can't get anywhere. I'm not the type of person who things come to; I have to go get it."

Anwar stares at me. "I notice you. Our friends notice you. How much could you need?"

Snow begins to fall from the sky, stinging my nose and cheeks. I turn from Anwar and gather up my bags. "Do you even know where you're going?"

I don't look at him. The wind rushes faster and louder as I walk forward, sucking away the sounds of whatever else Anwar may be saying. When I finally look behind me, no one is there. I stand in the cold, snow whirling around and around my center point. My bag is heavy on my shoulder, so I slip it off. Apples and muffins roll out of the bag into the snow, and I leave them behind. The cold bites and scrapes at my skin, eating away at me and frosting over whatever is left.

I think to myself, if I give up here, I'll always be the same as I ever was. Grey, cold, and stagnant. And I can't stand that idea.

So I walk. I push through the banks of snow, shivering so hard I can barely stand. I find myself at the foot of a tall mountain, soaring so high that I can't see the top. Snow tumbles down into the valley I stand in, and I can't see anything else. There is nowhere else for me to go - and then the snow stops. The flowers bloom, and I see someone.

A woman sits at the base of a blooming tree, petals falling gently on her head and shoulders. Her dark hair is so long that it pools on the ground around her, tangling with the long grass. Her clothes are thin and sheer, sleeves and skirts moving as if of their

own accord. In front of her lies a small pond.

"Who are you?" I collapse to my knees in front of the pond separating us. She shakes her head, gestures to the water. When I lean over the edge, I barely recognize the girl looking back at me.

She's faded, pale and gaunt, with all her hair grey and limp. I shiver; not from the cold, but from the sight of the person I've become. I'm beautiful in a haunting way, but there is no shred of life in me. I'd turn heads now, but what would they see if they looked at me?

"Who are you?" The woman asks me. "I'm..." I cannot remember what is supposed to come next. The words I'm looking for escapes me. "I'm looking for something. I want to write something original. To wow an audience. To be remembered."

The woman nods. She takes out a fountain pen from inside her sleeve and holds it up for me to see. The pen glows in her hand, a black so deep it sucks the light out of everything around it. Flecks of green and silver shimmer on the body and genuine gold flakes off the tip.

"I was once like you." The woman touches the pen with reverence. "I came looking for the same thing. There are very few who are willing to give up what is necessary to become the Scribe."

I lean in closer. "You've done it. What have you made?"

The Scribe meets my gaze, and I shiver. Everything that is paled about me is reflected twofold in her empty eyes. She touches the pen to the surface of the lake, and I look in. All her stories rush through my head, all the worlds she's created, every detail of every word.

I look into her blank eyes. "I don't understand any of it."

She bows her head, although her expression does not change. She doesn't

seem disappointed, merely acknowledging. "You are human. You cannot." "What about you? You said you were once like me."

The Scribe looks past me as if she can see something in the snowy haze. "When I was human I wrote for humans. You understand what you know, and all you know is to be human. What else have humans ever written about? There is nothing new." "Then to be the Scribe is to be inhuman?"

"Yes. You may take my role, but you will be here. The only one to possess this knowledge. And you will be great."

I look back at my reflection. The sky above me is so clear that it stretches forever. There is no one behind me or beside me, and I have a vision of myself alone here for the rest of time, trying so hard to be understood with no one around to even try.

The Scribe holds out her pen.

Something tugs at the back of my brain. A voice I don't recognize tells me it notices me, knows me. The feeling of warmth as sunlight touches my neck and laughter washes over me. A feeling of peace falls over me. My heart slows, my breathing settles.

I sit back on my haunches and take another look around the area. The green space, at first appealing, is admittedly small and claustrophobic. The area is so quiet. Just a couple steps away is the oppressive snowy world, and I get the feeling that I'll be suffocated here for the rest of eternity. "No thank you."

The Scribe shows no change in emotion. She merely takes the pen back and nods. "You are wiser than I was. There is no sense in greatness without purpose. Only in mundanity can you find a seed to grow. Write about the life you have and write honestly. Someone will feel you."

I get to my feet and bow my head goodbye. The whirling of the wind

swallows me as I walk back into the snowstorm, but this time it almost feels comforting. I let myself walk the way my feet take me, and before I know it I'm standing at my desk. A scatter of papers is splayed all over the surface, pen scribbled on typed lines. Red slashes and marks and cuts cover the papers. I can't even remember what I was writing about before, but I push the papers aside now and grab a new sheet.

A photo frame is knocked over on my desk. I pick it up. My family's faces smile back at me. I tap my pen a few times before putting it to work. The Scribe had told me to be honest, and that someone would hear me one day. Anwar had said the same thing, that all the great poets had written about life. I can only try and do the same now.

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The glass on the front door warps my reflection, but I recognize myself now more than ever. My skin is the same sunkissed brown as every summer, smooth except for a couple freckles. My eyes break into brown shards all throughout the stained glass, and my hair is a dark mess of curls.

All except for one white streak. The door swings open, and Anwar gapes at me. Before he could speak, I thrust out the paper in my hand.

"I found what I was looking for. But you were right all along, I didn't need it. I said some pretty awful things to you, and I'm sorry. But I'm back and I figured I'd try something with what I have now. So I wrote something for you."

Anwar takes the letter slowly. He weighs it in his hands; his lips part and then settle in a smile. He looks at me with warmth, and all he says in the end is, "Thank you, Alma." ■

# Bangladeshi Community News

## Highlights 2024

2024 was eventful for the Bangladeshi community of Brantford. The community organized some social/cultural events. Here are the highlights of those events.

### Ekushey February Feb 25, 2024

With solemn respect, Language Martyrs day was observed by the Bangladeshi community of Brantford. Monowara Akter-Sajjad Hossain kindly opened their door for this occasion. Abu Haque anchored the program. He presented a small slide show about Ekushey for the kids. Sajjad Hossain gave a speech highlighting the significance of the day. Solo and group music were performed by Farin Hasan, Raiha Haque, Abia Zaman (Nuba), Abu Haque, and Fatema Taskin Luna. Aribah, Afia Zaman (Nuha), Faiha Hasan, and Tabassum Bari recited poems. Nujha Noman and Julfa Noman recited poems written by their dad Abu Noman Tarek. Sadhia Sanjida (Kotha) and Arham Hasan (Reet) played a duet

of the "Ekushey" song with Kotha on piano and Reet on violin. There was a game show on Bangla spelling, word making, and rearranging scrambled words. The Haque family came out to be winner, who was awarded a certificate "Banglabid Family," hand drawn by Farin and Faiha. Everyone was in traditional black and white attire. As is the norm, no program is complete without food in the Bangladeshi community, different traditional foods were served.



spreading a feeling of happiness and togetherness through the hall. Kids performed and staged a play directed by Fatema Taskin Luna, which was applauded by the whole audience. Some traditional foods were served. It was a very well-organized occasion to celebrate Bengali identity through culture, food, and costumes. ■

### Pohela Boishakh April 14, 2024

It was a joyous occasion. All Bengali families from Brantford, and their friends from other cities, gathered and spent a fun-filled day together. For the first time, a hall room was rented in Brantford for a Bangladeshi Community event. The hall was colourfully decorated, and everyone was in colourful traditional dresses,





## Bangladeshi Community Picnic 2024

Last year's annual picnic took place on the 13th of July at Waterford Conservation Area, and had many activities including canoeing and kayaking. The canoes and kayaks were rented using the proceeds from the entry tickets. There was also a free raffle ticket provided with every entry ticket purchased.

The event started at 11:30 am, with snacks and tea being served whilst everyone arrived. This was followed by access to the beach (where the canoes and kayaks were provided). Lunch was served at around 2:30 pm, followed by the games organised by Shakil Bhai. Imam Tareeq led the midday and evening prayer in the congregation before the winners of the games and raffles were announced.

The adult males were surprised with a free lungi which had the logo of the picnic (the logo was created by Arham Hasan Reet). All the adult males were then encouraged to the "Lungi Dance" song.

The organizers would like to thank everyone who joined the picnic and hope to see all members of the Bangladeshi Community at this year's picnic which will be held at Shade's Mills Conservation area.





## Protest against the killing of Bangladeshi Students: July 21, 2024



Members of the Brantford Bangladeshi community felt that they should do something about the killings happening in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government was trying to silence the student uprising with measures unparalleled in cruelty. Tabassuma suggested to join the protest organized in Hamilton. Sajjad proposed, instead, to organize a protest in Brantford. Many members of the community responded positively. In Abu Haque's place, some families got together and painted some posters with slogans of solidarity with the student movement, slogans against autocracy,

and signs demanding the immediate cease in the use of brutal force and killing of students by Bangladesh's ruling government. Bangladeshi community members gathered in front of the City Hall in Dalhousie Street. Everyone was holding a poster or waving the Bangladeshi flag and chanting slogans calling for stopping violence against students. It was a sunny day; kids, dads and moms from the Bangladeshi community stayed there for around an hour and a half. This energetic group with their slogans and posters transcended the Dalhousie road to a Dhaka street, showing solidarity with the bloody movement going on in Bangladesh. ■



## Bangla School

During the picnic, Tabassuma Bari and Imam Tareeq had a conversation regarding starting a Bangla School for the kids. Imam Tareeq approached Taslim Chowdhury (Bhadon) to help get a list of all the kids and start a survey to see how interested the community is in starting a Bangla School.

It was determined that there was enough interest from the community to start the process of creating the Bangla School. Imam Tareeq introduced Tabassuma Bari to the organizers of the Grand Erie Learning Alternatives (GELA).

Registration started at the beginning of September and there were 19 students registered which was enough to start the classes. After the registration of all the students, Tabassuma Bari was confirmed as the teacher, and the first class started on Saturday the 28th of September. The community held an inauguration party to celebrate the beginning of the Bangla Classes after the first day of the class.

The members of the community took great interest in donating to the school and Tabassuma Bari was purchasing food for every class. She had requested some notebooks and folders



for the students. The responsibility of collecting donations was taken by Imam Tareeq and he was able to raise \$650 for the school.

Bangla Classes are held on Saturdays from 9:00 am to 11:30 am with the help of volunteers and two teachers - Tabassuma Bari and Salina Akter. Monowara Akther and Nazneen Rashid have been volunteering their time to help the teachers in the classroom. We also have 5 youth volunteers - Kolpo, Reet, Nuha, Kotha, and Aribah - who have been alternating each week to help in the classroom. As student attendance is very import-

ant, the Bangla School Committee is offering free pick up and drop off for busy parents. ■

### Halaqa:

Bengali Muslims in Brantford started a monthly Halaqa.<sup>1</sup> Imam Abu Noman Tareeq runs and leads this religious discussion session, and other participants ask him different questions related to Islamic rituals and laws arising from their everyday life experience. It was started in the honour and remembrance of Imam Tareeq's mother-in-law, who died at the beginning of the preceding year. The first Halaqa happened at his place and then families took turns to host every month. At the end of the event, a potluck dinner is served. It's a monthly gathering that Brantford Bengali Muslims have started to consider as part of their regular monthly activity. ■



1. Halaqa (Arabic, romanized: Halaqah, lit. 'circle/ring') in Islamic terminology refers to a religious gathering or meeting for the study of Islam and the Quran.

## Seminar

November 9, 2024

A seminar was organized by the Bangladeshi community of Brantford, titled “What Kind of Bangladesh We Envision: Problems, Prospects, and the Outline of Reform.” It took place at the central public library’s main branch auditorium. Abu Haque was the keynote speaker. In his speech, Abu Haque summarized the background and the chain of events that unfolded in Bangladesh during the July uprising, which inspired the organizers to plan the seminar. He also elaborated on what kind of reformation he would like to see after the July movement against fascism and the regime change in Bangladesh.

Sajjad Hossain, Nafeez Fatima, Jahan-gir Chowdhury, Shakil Hasan delivered their speech after the keynote speech. They talked about their envisioned reformation and shared their dreams for the future of Bangladesh with the audience.

There was a small break: some snacks were served courtesy of Syed Karim (Diamond). Then the seminar resumed, and everyone in the Audi-



ence got a chance to talk about their vision of a new Bangladesh after the popular uprising. Finally, Abu summarized the visions that have been stated in the seminar.

Sajjad Hossain anchored the seminar. Most of the heavy burden of organizing work was carried out by Taslim Chowdhury (Badhon); he was assisted by Raiena and Arham Hasan (Reet).

Seminar organizers hope to keep organizing seminars on different topics of interest in the future. The next seminar is planned to be held this Summer on Climate Change. ■

# Diaspora: A Quest for Identity

ABU HAQUE

The vast and cold land lies dead ahead like an unending white cotton field covered in snow as far as the eyes can see, only to shine like a cascade of diamonds from the occasional bright reflection! Unless necessary, people lock themselves indoors during those long, dull, wintry days, as the thermostat can drop far below the freezing temperature with the gusty winds sending shivers through the spines. But those cold slate-grey snowy days were over. With the arrival of the summer, nature rejuvenated and got out of the cold at last. It felt nice, a few Bangladeshi families living in Brantford also enjoyed the beautiful summer. However, the same cannot be said about Bangladesh, as something was brewing. Tension was mounting and a patch of darkness was looming over the fate of the nation. The recipe of an inevitable and impending disaster had been brewing for quite some time, but it reached the boiling point that summer, anything was possible. The heat reached far and beyond the borders, and expatriate Bangladeshis across the globe have been closely monitoring the development. The fascist regime of the Hasina government held onto the power illegitimately and ruled the country unconstitutionally. Not only people were rigged off of their voting rights but they were also forcibly silenced under an oppressive rule that deployed a reign of terror through its party cadres, extrajudicial killing, and state-sanctioned enforced disappearance. People were already fed up, and fascist Hasina's violent response to students' peaceful protest against the job quota system quickly escalated into a one-point demand for the fascist regime to step down.



Source: [www.dhakatribune.com](http://www.dhakatribune.com)

The fascist Hasina wasn't prepared to step down so easily, she waged an all-out war against the people by deploying the party cadres, police, and the military to kill hundreds of innocent students and protestors in a few days. The entire country went off the grid, like a black hole, nothing was coming out of that place. The Brantford Bangladeshi community, like other diasporas living in different parts of the world, felt the need to step up, as they were getting anxious and worried about the ongoing situation. They feared the worst, and they wanted to demonstrate their solidarity with the ongoing movement. The community was mobilized through a series of actions including holding a protest rally in front of the Brantford City Hall. They also participated in a flash protest with posters and placards at a concert for the community. The diaspora community voiced their opinion and demanded that the fascist "Must Go!"

The Hasina regime severed all connectivity, as they killed the Internet. It was the worst feeling of desperation and hopelessness, but the news and videos of the unlawful killings and brutal violence in the streets of Dhaka and elsewhere in the country were

leaked. The one-point demand took precedence over everything else, but the fascist regime resorted to a final assault and ordered an all-out killing mission against its citizens. The protests did not go in vain, through a dramatic turn of events, before the much-feared mass killing could begin, the fascist Hasina fled the country. The Bangladeshi diaspora all over the world kept on pushing the cause and in the same spirit, Bangladeshi community in Brantford organized a seminar that discussed the problems and prospects in the aftermath of the uprising and came up with specific reform proposals.

Although any diaspora may have sworn their allegiance to a different space and authority, they cannot ignore the pull toward the roots. They cannot isolate themselves from the ongoing struggle in a place they once may have chosen to abandon. Because they still cherish a "Bangladesh" inside, and they carry it with them wherever they go. Thus, it transcends time and space. It becomes a utopia that translates their living space to match the idea of a "desh," which in turn transforms their bodies into a body politic and ultimately a quest for identity. ■



Digital Art By TAFHIM CHOWDHURY

## Reflection

ARHAM HASAN

I sit and stare, reflections in water,  
I wonder who I see.  
The wind gently blows, the lake kindly  
shows,  
A face smiles back - who's he?  
Bengali? Canadian? A stranger, a foe?  
A brother? First son? Old friend to let  
go?  
A muslim, a child, self-centered, or  
kind?  
Material machine, incorporeal mind?  
I sit and stare, reflections in water,  
I can't tell you what I see.  
As the wind will still blow, at least I  
will know,  
Despite it all - that's me.

Our idea behind the magazine was to create a platform for Bangladeshi diaspora to engage intellectually with local as well as global sociopolitical and cultural events: a space to bring in different currents of thoughts and discourses to interact for validation and evolution, a companion and vehicle for a vibrant social existence. Publishing creative and analytical works, this magazine can act as a mirror, where the diaspora can reflect on its hyphenated existence and have a better grasp of the problems and prospects of their lived experience. We would invite everyone from the Bangladeshi community, from budding young minds to grey heads, to contribute to this magazine with their creative expressions and ideas, and make it a vibrant space of fruitful interaction.

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