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## OP-ED: A life led by conscience and things we can learn from it

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Photo: Courtesy

### In remembrance of the life and work of Syed Humayun Kabir

Writing about your parents in the past tense never gets easier. Even after five years, I feel a lump in my throat thinking about my father. For those who were close to my father, Syed Humayun Kabir, will undoubtedly agree that he was an extraordinary human being.

He had a heart of gold that wept at the plight of people who were less fortunate than him. He never shied away from lending a helping hand to those who needed it, be it a family member, a friend, or a stranger.

As a child, I recall that one day, my father literally picked up a sickly young girl off the streets to come and live with us. Her name was Banu and she lived with us till the day she died. She

proudly called herself “Humayun Kabir’s daughter.” Such acts were not unusual for my father, and no one batted an eyelid when a complete stranger was brought in to come and live with us. That was my Abba. That was what he did.

Abba led his life with unshakable values and morals; he was a devout Muslim who loved and cherished his family. Each and every family member was important to him, and he made sure they knew that till the day he died. He never lied, never cheated, and never said a cruel word about anyone. This may seem like exaggerated words of a proud daughter, but I assure you, it is not. He never engaged and never let us engage in any “gossip” or make any hateful comments about anyone. His outlook on life was positive and he always saw the good in people.

I am fortunate enough to now be a small part of my father’s legacy -- the SAJIDA Foundation. It is incredible to see how far this organization has come; what started as a small garage school in my parents’ residence is now an institution that has positively impacted the lives of millions of people in Bangladesh.



When it came to human dignity, he didn’t compromise; he held it high both through preaching and practising. SAJIDA strives to walk in the footsteps of Syed Humayun Kabir; all their initiatives are well thought out and align with what their founder would have valued the most.

Many times, I have heard the CEO (my elder sister) ask “What would he have wanted? Is this the direction he would want us to take?” These are not easy questions to answer, and often it is

even harder to design a program based on the gold standard values and morals of the founder.

Of all the successful programs that SAJIDA has run over the years, I would like to highlight two which I have had the privilege to observe closely, and which in my view strongly reflect the values of my father.

One of them is "Aamrao Manush," which serves homeless adolescents, women, and children, and the other is SAJIDA hospital's recent initiative to tackle Covid-19. The "Aamrao Manush" program runs centres all around Dhaka, where there are day care facilities for the children of working mothers, classrooms for older children, and night shelter facilities for women and children. The children are provided with uniforms, books, meals, and beds to take naps in during the day.

I was very emotional the first time I visited the program's flagship centre in Sadarghat. I could feel my father's presence amongst the brightly coloured walls, the children's artwork, the spacious classrooms, the rows of bunk beds, and the laughter of the kids. He would have been happy to see that SAJIDA has taken it upon itself to look after the people who are often invisible in our society. Like him, SAJIDA Foundation sees potential in everyone it serves.

If given the right opportunity, anyone can strive to have a better life. Children living on the streets can be taken out of poverty with the right support and education. Vulnerable women can be helped by providing them with a safe place to stay, training them, or even reaching out when they need help. This program was set up to do just that: Serve the population left behind simply because they are floating and without fixed addresses.

One of SAJIDA's recent initiatives has been widely praised for its timely and life-saving intervention -- Narayanganj Hospital. SAJIDA rapidly converted this hospital as a Covid-designated hospital with an MOU with the government. This unit was financed by SAJIDA's own funds and funds donated by generous individuals, corporates, and donor agencies.

This hospital provides free medical treatment to all patients. No one is turned away. SAJIDA Hospital provides services free of cost, including medicine, oxygen supply, diagnostics cabin rent, ICU, dialysis, ambulance service, and food, among others. As can

be expected, the occupancy at SAJIDA Hospital exceeds capacity very often and serves patients from different remote districts, with patients from Dhaka and Narayangang comprising only 45%.

What I find so unique about SAJIDA is its unfettered dedication and courage to step up when there is a crisis. Transforming part of its Narayanganj hospital into a Covid treatment centre had to happen overnight, and the management did everything in its power to make sure that happened. Every safety protocol was put in place to ensure the wellbeing of the patients, doctors, and nurses. As a result, the number of doctors and nurses infected were extremely low.

In line with the values of its founder, SAJIDA from its inception has placed very high importance on quality as opposed to quantity. My father always believed in starting small but doing it right. SAJIDA is very critical of its own work and its programs are nimble enough to revisit and re-evaluate if it appears that the needs of the beneficiaries are not being met as well as they could be. Not all organizations can claim to do that.

I truly believe that if my father were alive today, he would have been proud of SAJIDA's work. His presence is sorely missed, but my family takes solace from the fact that his legacy can live on through the tireless effort of each and every employee of an organization that is there to serve the needs of millions.

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