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Growing up as a Bangladeshi Muslim woman in America, I have always felt restricted. At times I wish I were born from a different nationality, under a different religion, or even of a different gender. Seeing Bangladeshi women being confined in their homes as housewives whose only job was to bare children and raise them on top of being a 'slave' to their husbands is normal, even expected. I rarely saw women from my country expand their horizons by obtaining an education or working outside of their homes. And, if they did, they were known to be a 'disgrace' to the community. Having witnessed things like this since infancy, I promised myself I would not be just another 'one'; I wanted to be 'the one'.

If I laughed "too loud" or was "too friendly", I was acting out of character of how a well-mannered/well brought-up Bangladeshi woman should carry herself. I always thought of myself to be different; one who could not just accept things for the way they were. So instead, I took a stand. I have worked outside the house since I was 14 years old and since then I have interned working with senior citizens, elementary students, union leaders, police officers, modeling agencies, government officials and so on. I am also the first female to have graduated from college in my family. I earned my Bachelor of Arts, within four years, in Political Science with a double minor in law and history from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I am currently employed working as a political organizer for the New York City Public Advocate's Office and I am also pursuing my Masters in Urban Policy and Administration from Brooklyn College's Graduate Center for Worker's Education. I plan to continue on to law school to pursue my dream of becoming a criminal prosecutor and then I want to run for Congress one day - ultimately becoming Senator of New York. When I retire, I want to go back to Bangladesh and also travel to other third world countries to help them prosper, even if it is in the smallest of ways. In short, I hope to build nursing homes for the elderly and homeless shelters for the less fortunate. Impossible is not a word in my vocabulary.

I am also the Chair of the Youth Committee of the Alliance of South Asian American Labor (ASAAL). Organizing the youth has proven to be a really difficult task. But, when I ask a young Bangladeshi woman what she wants to do when she grows up, I have gotten the same answer time and time again: 'I don't know.' Young Bangladeshi women are raised to accept the reality that not only will they be married off to someone of their parents choosing, but getting an education is merely a way for them to occupy themselves until that time comes. Essentially, they go from being under the reign of their parents to being under the reign of their husband. Bangladeshis see that I am a highly motivated woman at 23 years old, but unfortunately the look in their eyes suggests that I am wasting my time. What shocks them most however is not how much I know or how well I speak, but rather where I come from. I have influenced many girls to get involved, and to become leaders. I realize the best way to show these young ladies they can achieve

this status or higher is by getting them involved in various projects that will help them develop leadership skills. This summer I plan to lead a summer internship in which young adults will be working on voter registration projects throughout New York. We will work together on arranging fund-raisers and reaching out to other organizations and government officials to let them know of our efforts. We will emphasize the importance of education by putting together scholarships, college seminars and other things of its sort. Together we will introduce youths to what jobs await them after they obtain their college degrees. I fully intend to be the voice for those young Bangladeshi women struggling to be heard, those looking for a way out but have never dared to take a chance.

I do not want to be remembered as the first-female-to-graduate-from-college-in-my family or the first-Bangladeshi-Muslim-woman-to-eventually-run-for-Congress. I want to be remembered as the one who gave young Bangladeshi girls a voice. I want to be someone who gave them hope where there was none and broke them out of this archaic tradition. I want to be remembered as someone who made them believe in themselves and their futures. I want to be the change that echoes freedom.