First Debating Experience

Sahmi

I was a bit nervous when I heard from Mabroor bhai that I had to participate in a Bangla debate in Chittagong University debate festival. It was on 10th December at 11pm that Mabroor bhai (from Islamic University of Technology), Sinha (from North South University), Jovan (from Peoples University of Bangladesh) and I (from Independent University, Bangladesh) started our journey from Dhaka to Chittagong by bus to attend CUDS's (Chittagong University Debating Society) debate festival. We reached Chittagong very early in the morning and received a very warm welcome from CUDS. After having breakfast in the hotel I got really nervous as this would be the first time in my life that I was going to debate and I didn't even know the basics. Mabroor bhai and Sinha as usual were continuously talking about debate. These two are among the best debaters in Bangladesh.

The debate festival was held in Muslim Institute. We went to the venue around 11am.There I met Hemal bhai (General Secretary, CUDS) and he told me that we would be taking part in not only one but two sessions, the first on (11th December) and the second on (12th December)". Then Hemal bhai introduced me with my partners. One of them was from USTC (University of Science and Technology, Chittagong) and the other one from CUET (Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology). My partners briefed me well and we geared ourselves up for the big moment. It was a teacher verses student debate. Luckily we did very well in that one.

The next morning I met Rishad from IUT in my hotel room. He is also a good debater. My second debate format was three dimensional (3D). In 3D format there are three teams; first team does the thesis on the topic, the second team does the anti thesis and the third team performs the synthesis. I was on the anti thesis team and my partner was Sinha. The debate was good and it was fun.

Just after my second debate Mabroor bhai told me," Listen Sahmi, we are short of English debaters, so you have to debate with us and the debate will be in world's format." I became too nervous and my English debate was not that good. But I got the true taste of debate. It is really interesting and very much enjoyable. Debate not only enriches one's knowledge, it also makes people confidant and helps to figure out the logic.

Two Hugs are Better than One

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From then on, for the rest of the day, I was sucked into a wind-whirl of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), jotting down endless tit bits on rural life, making chart slides out of our findings and preparing for our evening presentations. The next day we had to go to the local bazaar or the "haat" to analyze the rural market. So it wasn't till the third day that we got a chance to go back to our area of study. But Surprise! While we were thinking whether the villagers would accept us and tolerate us for another day, it was a totally different scenario. When we arrived at our assigned area (the Jelepara of Katigram), we found that the village women were eagerly waiting for our visit. An elderly housewife hugged me fondly and whispered in my ear how they had waited and waited for us to come by the day before. Her neighbor, the old woman, had even dissolved in tears when we didn't come. For I had reminded her of her beloved grand daughter who was away living in the city.

The housewife took us by the hand and led us to the house of the old woman. She was sitting inside, in the shadows of her scanty room but hearing us, she came out. Her face, which was lined with the hard lines of age and suffering, suddenly lit up with a beautiful smile. She reached out to touch my arm, lovely holding my palms in her bony hands. And she hugged me tight. Twice...

I guess at this point, I'm expected to come up with a clichéd ending like: "It hit me then and there..." and follow it with a few lines packed with tear wrenching emotions about how this event changed me for the better. But I can't. Because it wasn't anything sudden like that. That morning, standing in front of the old woman, I felt strange. I felt that I could interact with the old woman on a different level. The "three-rule" mentality didn't apply here anymore. I guess I somewhat forged a special tie with her. A bond that grew only because I looked like her grand daughter and only because she accepted me so wholeheartedly into her life. And for someone like me, who grew up in the cities, learning to be suspicious of everyone and everything, this emotion of the old woman touched me. It made me think twice about who I was.

So on the eve of February 5th, which will mark the end of the first month since I met the old woman, I wish this humble piece would pay homage to the woman who thought of me as her grand daughter, to human connection in general and to the power of hugs.

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