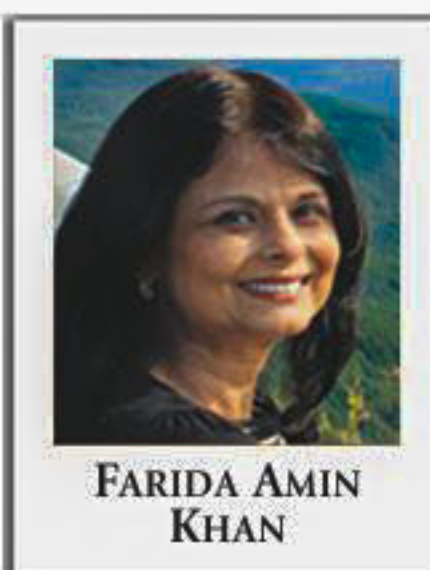


Fighting for our future

Finding my voice as a Muslim woman in Trump's America



FARIDA AMIN KHAN

As we watched in horror the sea of red unfolding over the map of America, a place I had called home for the last 37 years, and the reality began to sink in that the unthinkable had happened—Donald

Trump had been elected President of the United States—we had still not grasped what that would mean to those of us who were Muslims living in this country. A candidate like Trump had never been successful in a campaign of this scale before. We vehemently criticised him over his divisive and hateful rhetoric, and generally felt secure that ultimately the American people would vote with their conscience. We watched as Hillary Clinton came out on top of nearly every poll, despite being barraged with attacks on her character and political career from all sides. But the final outcome of this election was one that few, and seemingly even Trump himself, could have predicted.

The year I moved to this country was the year Ronald Reagan was elected as president. He served two terms. I was busy learning to adjust to my new life and raising kids in an environment totally foreign to me. Two more presidents followed, Bush Senior for one term and eight years of Bill Clinton at the helm. I cast my first vote as a US citizen for Clinton, and subsequently shed tears when Gore lost in a messy election against George W. Bush. My civic sense had a wake-up call that year. I realised that active participation was necessary to change the course of an election. We chafed under eight long years of George Bush and worried about our fate as Muslim Americans after 9/11.

Then came the unprecedented and historic election of Barack Hussein Obama. I had poured my heart and soul into his campaign, volunteering at my local Democratic Party office and engaging with my community in a way I never had before. The day he was elected was a watershed moment in the history of the United States. We were euphoric and proud to be Americans and the world rejoiced with us. Little did we know that the seeds of hate and division were already being sown. We saw them manifest in the form of the Tea Party, a rag tag group of misinformed people, many of them with racist tendencies, who claimed they wanted "big government" out of their lives. Most political pundits dismissed them as a fringe group - easy to do given how they presented themselves, with tea bags hanging from their hats or ears, waving "Don't Tread on Me"



Protests break out over Trump's ban on Muslim arrivals.

PHOTO: STAR

flags and pictures of our president looking like an ape or Hitler. But they turned out to be the most effective voice in changing the course of the mid-term elections of the Senate and the House. An emboldened Republican Congress vowed to obstruct Obama at every step of the way. Even though he won two terms, Obama's presidency was a constant thorn to many who found it intolerable that a Black man, with distant foreign roots, was in the White House.

Enter Donald Trump onto a stage he had crafted for the past eight years, sowing the seeds of doubt about the legitimacy of our first Black president and riding the wave of the poor, disenfranchised and largely white community that loved him. Trump's first campaign speech was filled with epithets about Mexicans. Then came his bombshell statement about banning all Muslims from entering the United States. Most people on both sides of the aisle were stunned and outraged. But to his base it was music to their ears. They cheered loudly and

raucously. It was clear that Trump thrived on throwing red meat to his fans and fed off their applause and unwavering allegiance. And then, as if by a strange twist of fate, came the San Bernardino killings by a radicalised "Muslim" couple. Soon after, the most horrific mass murder of innocent people since 9/11 at a bar in Florida. Around the world we saw Paris, Nice, Belgium and Dhaka fall prey to lone wolves who swore their allegiance to ISIS. We saw the fate of Britain as it unexpectedly voted in favour of Brexit, largely due to the xenophobic messaging of the campaign. Muslims around the world watched, simultaneously horrified and increasingly fearful of the backlash. Despite vocal denouncement of these acts by Muslim leaders, Trump's arsenal against Islam was getting bolstered with each headline. Steadily he stoked latent racist and anti-immigrant tendencies and built the raging hateful fire that carried him to the White House.

Throughout his campaign, Trump

continued to hammer his promise of banning all Muslims from entering the US, later revising it to say Muslims from states that sponsored terrorism, namely Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and also from "compromised countries" like Germany and France where local Muslims had been radicalised. The fact that such a policy if implemented would be totally unconstitutional does not seem to faze this man or his base. He continues to threaten millions of innocent people with his promise of creating a national registry for Muslims in the United States. He has stated repeatedly that he will institute extreme vetting procedures for any Muslim seeking entry to the US, including refugees fleeing war-torn Syria. His executive order bans Muslims from seven countries from entering the US.

Needless to say, Muslim Americans are facing a unique challenge in these times. But rather than insulating ourselves and living in fear, many of us are seeing this as the time to rise up in protest. Tens of thousands

of American Muslims are banding together with thousands more non-Muslim allies to fight for the liberty, freedom and protection that the Constitution guarantees to all its citizens. Holocaust survivors have likened this registry to the registries of Jews, gypsies and the LGBTQ group that preceded the Holocaust. Notable prisoners of Japanese internment camps such as American actor George Takei have drawn similar parallels, and are calling this out as a dangerous red flag.

Now we are seeing large swaths of our communities rise up in protest. The burning desire to do something proactive made me travel across the country to Washington D.C. to take part in the historic Women's March the day after the inauguration. It was the most uplifting public event that I had ever participated in. I felt empowered by the energy, the empathy, the generosity of the people of this country. Together we roared, "No Muslim registry!" along with other empowering chants at the top of our lungs and it felt cathartic! Many who marched, held up placards with the soon-to-be iconic image of a girl donning an American flag hijab (who happened to be a Bengali girl from Queens!) Incidentally, she too participated in the Women's March in DC. Islamic institutions like CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations), MPAC (Muslim Public Affairs Council) and local mosques are ramping up their mission to create public awareness of the danger a Trump presidency is posing to the fundamental freedoms of citizens of this country, not just Muslims, but many other religions, races, minorities, women and their right to choose what's best for them.

In many ways, America is a beautiful experiment in multiculturalism. Its long history of social movements, fueled by women, minorities and other marginalised communities, has resulted in some of the most revolutionary social changes in history. But we can't continue to depend on the triumphs of the past to protect us and we can't expect others to fight our battles for us. As American Muslims, it is now up to us to ensure that we do not let what makes us different divide us and that the people of this country do not fall prey to hatefulness, no matter what community it is directed towards. We have been given the ultimate challenge, going up against a megalomaniacal, Orwellian demagogue who threatens to unravel the very fabric of this society. The time has come to roll up our sleeves and get to work!

The writer is a Bangladeshi American who lives in California, US.

FIFTH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF SIDDIQUA KABIR

My mother: A legend

ZARINA NAHAR KABIR

As soon as people find out who my mother is, I am invariably faced with the statement "Surely, being Siddiqua Kabir's daughter you must be an excellent cook!" My standard response is: "Well, I take after my father rather than my mother." The truth is my father would not have his daughter raised in the traditional role of a Bangalee girl expected to meet the culinary demands of her family. (Little did he realise how important a life-skill cookery is!) For that matter, he would get very impatient if Amma made herself too available in the kitchen, till he finally gave in to the fact that it was, in fact, enjoyable to her.

What makes Amma unique in my eyes is, however, neither her cooking nor her fame as the author of a recipe book that many refer to as their Bible. If I was asked to use one word to describe her, I would say 'balanced'. It is her ability to blend the modern

with the traditional, the balance she has maintained between her professional and family life, her quiet down to earth attitude that makes her a wonder to me. A woman in her mid-seventies, she can actually claim to have had it all - an extended family that adores and respects her, a profession that she loves and continues to thrive in. There is nothing extreme about Amma. Whatever she does, she does it because it needs to be done. She does not do things to make a statement yet she has steadily been breaking grounds performing on the radio in the '50s when very few women ventured out in the public let alone perform in the media; hosting the first cooking show on television already in the '60s; travelling abroad (USA) in the early '60s for a second Master's degree; as a young woman taking responsibility for her siblings in the early '50s despite the presence of an elder brother. Her father died when she was only 17 years old, preparing for the higher secondary



With her husband Syed Ali Kabir, 1991.

exams. She and her mother took up the reins to raise and educate her three younger sisters and a brother. She did not marry till the last of her siblings had graduated from

university and, in fact, all but her younger brother had married.

It is Amma's express wish that I write about my father, Syed Ali Kabir, in this piece. Her request itself

indicates the love that she feels for Abba. This love was mutual. Abba always said that one of the best things that had happened to him was to have Amma in his life. I have very seldom come across Banglaee couples (even today) where a husband so openly expresses his admiration and love for his wife as Abba used to do. A well-known and respected figure in his own right, he proudly and unabashedly declared himself as the husband of Siddiqua Kabir. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the TV show that turned the star of his life into a public star. My parents had a lot in common. A usual scenario at our home at 2 in the morning would be the two sitting at their respective tables writing away their columns, poems, novels, essays or recipes. Abba and Amma together created an environment at home where search for knowledge was simply natural and infinite. Apart from certain common characteristics such as discipline and organisation, what was amazing about the two was

that they always saw and highlighted the positive side of people. I have never heard my parents bad-mouthing others even when they have been scorched by them.

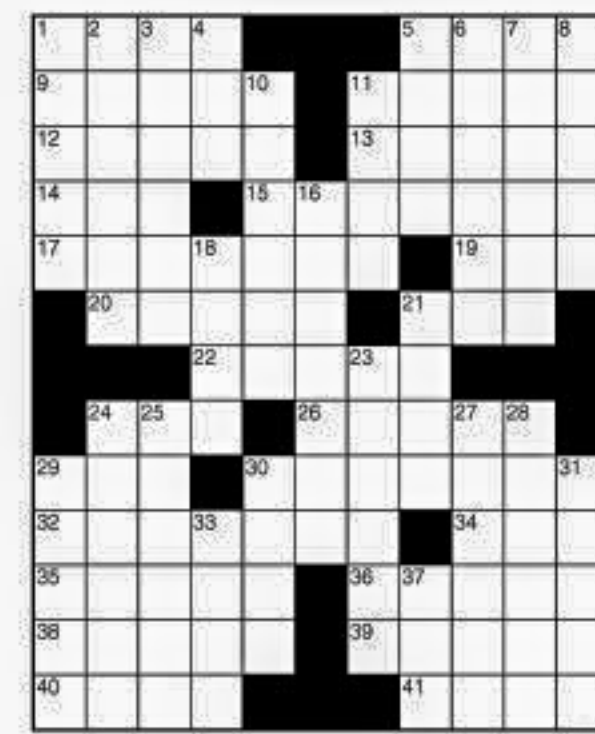
Finally, for most people my mother is a legend for the mark she has left in promoting a mundane domestic chore into an art and creating awareness on the nutritional aspects of food and diet. To me she is a legend for the wonderful and graceful blend that she is as a mathematician turned nutritionist turned academic turned author turned TV personality (turned model!), and a highly respected and loved matriarch in her very large extended family.

(Note: This piece was published in "Rondhon Shilpi Siddiqua Kabir", 2009. Prof Siddiqua Kabir passed away on Jan 31, 2012.)

The writer is Associate Professor of Public Health at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Perp pursuers
 - 5 Punt
 - 9 From the country
 - 11 Italian seaport
 - 12 City on the Mohawk River
 - 13 Happen again
 - 14 Spreading tree
 - 15 Like most prom goers
 - 17 Rife
 - 19- Jacinto
 - 20 Market direction
 - 21 That lady
 - 22 Cat's 2quarry
 - 24 Overly
 - 26 Bus units
 - 29 Moral no-no
 - 30 Cuts canines
 - 32 Vacillates
 - 34 Grammys category
 - 35 Peripheral device
 - 36 Unaided
 - 38 Swearer's words
 - 39 Recoil in pain
- 40** Look for
- 41** Title paper
- DOWN**
- 1 Vinegar bottle
 - 2 Factory store
 - 3 ABC book
 - 4 Bodily pouch
 - 5 Acute
 - 6 As a precaution
 - 7 Tawny cat
 - 8 Singer Carpenter
 - 10 Telemundo viewer
 - 11 Golfer Norman
 - 16 Product's final consumer
 - 18 Office note
 - 21 Warm up
 - 23 Vacillate
 - 24 Color, in a way
 - 25 Nervous 27 Royal roost
 - 28 Spooky gathering
 - 29 Rough guesses
 - 30 Look after
 - 31 Velocity
 - 33 Captured
 - 37 Topper



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

G A S H E S I O P E N
 A L K A L I N O V A
 S E I Z E T H E D A Y
 I N S E T
 L A N A A W E S
 R U N G P R O N T O
 E N D C A T J A R
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