



## ASIAN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN

TRANSCRIPT OF MAY 28, 2009 SPEECH

BY ACCESS ACADEMY STUDENT AZMINA KARIM

**Azmina Karim** is from Bangladesh and is a member of the Access Academy's inaugural class. She is graduating this July. After college, she wants to work for an organization devoted to the advocacy of disabled children in her home country. Azmina's documentary film, which she also presented at AUW's screening of "Lifting the Veil" in Tokyo, Japan, May 28<sup>th</sup>, is titled "This Silent World", and is about the experiences of deaf children. Azmina negotiated access to these children with their school and their guardians. She is currently working with a school for autistic children to create her next documentary. She has raised 10,000tk to purchase special equipment (sensory integration products) for this school. Below is the transcript of Azmina's speech.

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Naturally in South Asian countries, women find their identity by attaching someone's name with them. They also think a woman's identity lies in being someone's wife or mother. Unfortunately, I was not different from these women. Before coming here, my world was small. It was all about me, my family, and my bookish knowledge. To me, education means getting a degree for a good job and that was my ultimate goal in life.

To break all these archaic ideas, we saw a ray of hope through the Asian University for Women (AUW). AUW was established in Bangladesh with a new concept and added a new dimension to education. It has changed the thoughts of many women who thought women were born to be at home; women who thought that even with education they would be unable to do anything.

The dream of one man has changed hundreds of lives. He understood that women need to be empowered for the betterment of society. Now, after spending 13 months in AUW's Access Academy (AA), my philosophy of life has changed, and sometimes when I recall my memory, I find my thoughts were immature. Life is more than this. Life means knowing for enlightenment. My philosophy of life did not change in one day. It changed gradually after coming here.

Many incidents at the AA have changed my thoughts about life. I will share my experiences from the AA. Second day at the Access Academy, it was all about missing my family and crying. Then I saw my roommate who came and sat beside me, consoling me not to cry. At the time I realized though I don't know her, her grief of missing family is more than mine. But still she is here, trying to make me happy. She was sitting beside me, trying to not make me feel lonely. Actually, it made me feel better.

Afterwards, I thought, when we share happiness it spreads. Thinking too much about ourselves makes us abandoned, and if we can make someone smile in their hard time, that's the happiness which we can't get anywhere. These thoughts compel me to rethink the meaning of life.

When I entered the classroom, I have noticed my teacher was wearing *shalwar kameej* which was not her culture. She was wearing it because she knows to respect all cultures even if it is not yours. We were taught in class that from group discussions, we can know more. Education is not about getting degrees, it is about learning life lessons. It is about exploring your insights on different things.

When I heard Kimsru's speech in October 18th, 2008 where she talks about her life, she mentioned before coming to AA she only knew about articles. But in six months, she would speak English and she was communicating with hundreds of people that day. That day she taught me, no matter what your roots are or how badly you have struggled in life, it does not forestall yourself having big dreams. If you have dreams and firm belief in yourself, everything in this world can be achieved. When she was telling her life story, I could see tears in everyone's eyes.

That reminded me of my homeroom teacher Ms. Niki. She said, "I believe in all religions. We call our God in different names but follow the same rituals; we follow paths where God asks us to preserve humanity. I believe we are all tied to the same religion. Regardless of different religious beliefs, everyone was showing empathy to Kimsru because they were able to relate with her through the bond of humanity.

After seeing my teachers, I wanted to work like them and thus I have joined the community service club of AA where I go to teach slum children in Usho School. Teachers always inspire us to do social work. Every student in AA ought to bring change in their society by raising voice against any injustice or discrimination happening around us. Inspired from this motto, I have worked in groups and made documentary about gender discrimination against women and deaf children.

While working in the second documentary, I have realized our society is not just ignoring mentally and physically challenged children. I was a shamed to see how people treat others who are inferior to them. Then I have decided to work further with mentally challenged children, specifically, autistic children. People forget children are precious gifts from gods. We should take proper care of them rather than ignoring them. I have made a documentary where the grief of these children is explicit. I have noticed that because of lack of facilities like training, funds and treatments, these children die each day. I have raised funds for them to buy some necessary supplies for them like swings and rocking chairs.

Though the task was not easy, when I gave the things to them and saw the smiling faces of the children, I felt my hard work worth it. I am very thankful to AUW to make me realize my obligation towards my community and for changing my perspective of life. I am very fortunate that I got a new life through AUW, which makes me feel like someone special in society.