

Golam Kibria

By: Abdulaziz Mian

During my 21 years in Winnipeg, I have come across many people who have worked relentlessly for the well being of the community. Today, it is my pleasure to introduce to you another hard working pioneer of Winnipeg Muslim Community, Br. Golam Kibria.

AA: What can you tell us about yourself?

GK: I was born in Bangladesh in 1947. I married my lovely wife Rokeya Begum Chowdhury in 1972. I have two sons, Shawkat and Sami, and one daughter, Lisa. My educational background includes B.Sc in Mechanical Engineering from the Engineering University at Dhaka, Bangladesh. I also have M.Sc degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Management Certificate from the University of Manitoba. I came to Winnipeg in 1978. After completing my Masters from University of Manitoba, I started my career in Manitoba as a registered professional engineer. I have held various senior engineering positions with many organizations such as Monarch Industries and Manitoba Research Council. I also managed my own engineering consulting business and a manufacturing business for many years. Due to health reason, I have cut down my consulting work and sold the manufacturing business. Currently, I manage engineering and quality control operations at Cubex Limited.

AA: What did your experience when you arrived in Winnipeg?

GK: I arrived in Winnipeg with my wife and two children where I was received by a Bangladeshi family and four other students. They received us at the airport and did everything possible to make our settlement in Winnipeg as smooth as possible. Bangladeshi community used to be very small at that time. Every one was very cordial and friendly. We are grateful for their generosity and warmth. I am very proud to say that we are very good friends till today.

I was fortunate to find good group of friends through the Masjid. The Muslim community was very small at that time but it was very warm and welcoming. I started to participate in all Masjid activities. I was also very pleased to learn that a weekend Islamic school was in operation.

AA: What is your involvement in the community?

GK: I started to participate in community activities soon after my arrival. I realized that there was a need to keep the Muslim community together and to help retain Islamic values and identity. I worked with other community members and organized halaqas for Bangladeshi residents. We also initiated Quranic study and organized monthly seminar programs in the Masjid. I served this community as its 1st Vice President (1989-1991), trustee and Chair of the Land Committee (1991-1994), and President (1997-1999). We worked hard to achieve our defined goals. Some of the accomplishments were:

- Sponsored refugees from Afghanistan and other countries
- Organized refugee settlement programs
- Raised awareness of Islam to the greater community through various publications and news paper articles
- Strived for participation in radio programs
- Organized open houses in the Masjid
- Trained sisters to work as councilors
- Conducted a community wide survey
- Acquired a of 12.6 acre property on Waverley Street and completed basic groundwork for the new centre including design options and government funding

Currently I am one of the Editorial Board members of Manitoba Muslim newsletter. During my time as the President of the Association, we successfully made a coalition with multi-ethnic organizations and held a symposium on the human faces of Sanction on Iraq. We also pursued Canada Immigration to expedite our application to bring Sheikh Hosni to Winnipeg.

AA. What are your views on the MIA, and the Muslim community in Winnipeg?

GK: I have been always conscious about the needs of the community and how best to satisfy them. I believe it requires a strong and well-structured central organization to work in a multi-opinionated community and meet the challenges of diverse needs.

MIA is a vital organization for the Muslim community in Manitoba. As an umbrella organization, MIA bears a huge responsibility. Unfortunately, I have observed quite often that many great enthusiastic volunteers become frustrated because they cannot work effectively within MIA due to lack of resources and support.

AA. Do you feel the Muslim community has progressed? As a community what is our biggest challenge?

GK: Our community has evolved significantly during the last twenty years. The community has grown significantly. The new centre is under construction. A full time school is well established. New information and medical services are active and a new Masjid on Ellice has just opened its doors. All these achievements are signs of progress. I believe MIA can be a strong umbrella organization for all of its satellite organizations, provided they are willing to join hands and work closely with MIA. In addition, community members must actively participate to, support, develop and administer community-based programs. We can only receive what we pitch in to MIA.

I am extremely glad to see that the new centre is about to become a reality. Construction of this centre is a major undertaking for the community. This project is very important for our growth. Once complete, it will be a vibrant place for the entire community.

Every one in the community knows that MIA does not have enough resources. Therefore, MIA should re-evaluate its resources and the services it provides. In this process, primary consideration should be given to feasibility of funding and sustainability of quality programs on a long-term basis. One should also note that quality services could only be rendered with a qualified full time staff to support programs and volunteer workers. Budget and workable plans should be developed for major activities/undertaking without any further delay, which should be followed by an intense drive, to seek community support.