

PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN FORGING HER OWN PATH

A major turning point in the life of RGS alumna Fatima Siddiqui came along when she was just one, when her family made the decision to migrate from Pakistan to Singapore. As a first-generation Singaporean in her family, Fatima has had to forge her own path to get to the various pit stops in her life journey thus far. While she did not have guidance from someone who has been through it all, Fatima's supportive family who journeys alongside the peaks and valleys of her life is what motivates and inspires her. With that, Fatima is all set and ready to embark on the next chapter of her life, having attended her last Founder's Day here at RGS as a student, receiving the pinnacle Rafflesian Award, among several other accolades to her name. While she is still uncertain about her career path upon graduation, one thing's for sure: that for someone who "makes no-bake lemon cheesecake when life gives (her) lemons (instead of sticking) to good-old-fashioned lemonade", Fatima embraces the unexpected and brings something different to the table, and perhaps that inherent difference is what it took for her to forge the path that has brought her to where she stands today.

Her RGS Experience

"My RGS experience was transformative. There is no way I can do justice to it in a paragraph, so perhaps I will focus on introspection and reflection. The emphasis on taking a step back at appropriate junctures to take stock and reflect since Year 1 has really grown on me. Before RGS, I just went about life, and things just happened. But RGS taught me how to be a lot more deliberate in what I took on, and conscious of why I was doing certain things. At the same time, all this thinking helped me better understand who I was, beyond the titles and activities associated with me. A teacher once asked me, "If I were to take away your designation and duties, and maybe even your friends, would you still know who you are?" Thankfully, my answer is now a "yes"."

Learning Through the Raffles Programme

"Through the Raffles Programme, I was exposed to a myriad of programmes and competitions and what I enjoyed most was getting to meet individuals with similar interests. I hesitate to call them 'like-minded' individuals because even with similar interests, we had such diverse viewpoints and backgrounds - which is precisely what makes meeting them so enriching. For example, the Australasian Philosothon 2013 and ASEAN+3 Student Camp for the Gifted in Science in 2015 both introduced me to friends from other countries with the same love for Philosophy and Science, but with very different perspectives and different things we loved about the subjects... Of course, there was also the bonus of learning about other cultures when these programmes were international! What I intended to learn though, had never been content. For instance, I did not participate in the Science Mentorship Programme to gain specific scientific knowledge per se, because I feel that as we progress further in our education, we are constantly re-learning and questioning what we accepted to be true. So any content that I have learnt would possibly become irrelevant or out-of-date quite soon. What I did hope to learn, and fortunately managed to, were soft skills to develop myself as a person - because that is something transferable that stays, regardless of the field I choose to pursue in the future. Discovering this important distinction between the short-term aims of a programme, and what I hoped to gain in the long-term, was probably one of the most important things I learnt about myself."



Fatima Siddiqui from the class of 2015 is the recipient of this year's Rafflesian Award, the highest honour that RGS bestows on a student in recognition of her all-round excellence, and invaluable contributions and service to the school.



"Disbelief, and an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I had never really been one to enjoy being in the limelight very much... To realise that the community did see and appreciate what I thought was hidden from their view, is very heartening. I can't help but think that there are still so many others more deserving than me, but on the whole what I feel is really gratitude - for the support of the community that I know and love, and have worked tirelessly for over the past four years." - Fatima on receiving the pinnacle Rafflesian Award during RGS's 137th Founder's Day.



Fatima (first row, extreme right) and her roommates at the Australasian Philosothon 2013.

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Sleep More for More Time!

"This may seem counter-intuitive, but I personally feel that one of the best ways to make good use of my time is to make sure I get enough sleep. In my lower secondary days, I used to sleep by 9pm, and in upper secondary after I've taken on more commitments, 10pm (with exceptions in the weeks leading up to major events such as Orientation etc.). To me, getting enough sleep means I can be more alert in class, allowing me to retain more the first time I learn something, and subsequently, have to spend less time revising it. It also allows me to have more energy and to be more efficient, so everything else I do takes up less time. So it's really a win-win situation: sleep more, and you will have more time freed up (to sleep even more)!"



Fatima's final performance with the RGS Angklung Ensemble before she graduated from RGS.

Getting Acquainted with the Angklung

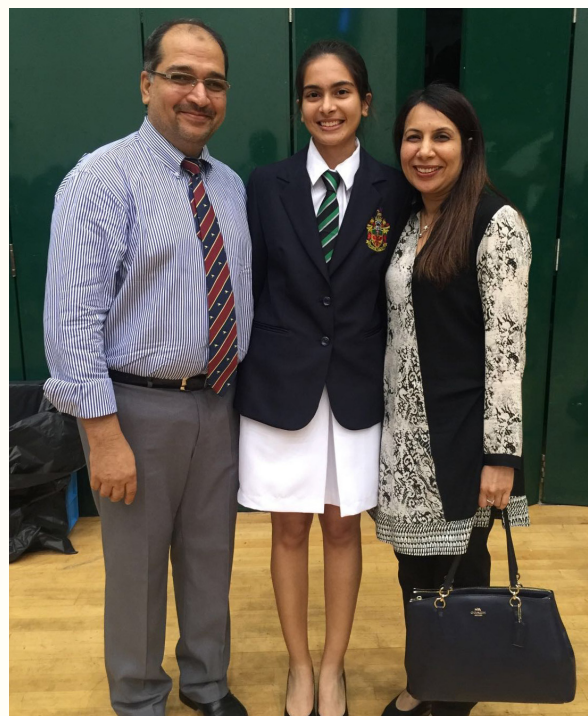
"My first encounter with the Angklung was probably at a cultural immersion camp in primary school, but I did not think much of it then. In fact, the reason why I chose to join the RGS Angklung Ensemble had less to do with the instrument and more to do with the environment. As a Year 1, I was not quite sure if I would even be accepted into any CCA because my skills were largely limited to studying up to that point in time. So I signed up for a multitude of CCA trials, among which was the trial for the Angklung Ensemble. If signing up for the trial was random, then my decision to join the CCA was the exact opposite, simply because I felt the warmth of a community that cared during the trial, where my seniors made it a point to check with all the Year 1s waiting for their turn on whether they had eaten, and sat down to chat with us and ensure that we were comfortable. They really emphasised the willingness to learn over prior experience as a criterion for selection. I knew whichever CCA I joined, the learning curve would be steep, but I had faith that Angklung would provide an understanding and non-judgemental environment to do so - and that it did."

Greatest Learning Experience at RGS

"Learning from my teachers outside of the four walls of the classroom was really one of the greatest learning experiences I've ever had. In my time in RGS, I had the privilege of interacting with teachers through my CCA, the Prefectorial Board, the Regional Studies Programme, Science Mentorship Programme and so on. All this time spent outside of the classroom really allowed me to grow closer to very inspiring teachers and to see them as who they are, beyond the subjects they taught. They have each moulded me in a different way, making me the person that I am today."

Hopes for RGS

"That she continues to be a safe environment for girls to grow. Nurturing confident young women who will stand up for their beliefs in today's world is no mean feat, but I'm confident that RGS will continue to do that. I hope that the safety of the environment too, remains as important as the development - because socio-emotional well-being is just as important as cognitive development. May we never neglect the 'heartware' for the 'hardware' as we aspire, strive and dare to be active creators of a better age for all!"



Fatima cites her parents as her biggest inspiration in life.

Her Biggest Inspiration

"I am very blessed to have a very big family, with each family member inspiring me in different ways. In particular, my parents have had a profound impact on my life. My father has always been one step ahead of everyone else in terms of anticipating issues that we may face and handling them with future readiness - the decision to migrate from Pakistan to Singapore before the political situation in Pakistan destabilised further was initiated by him, and he also encouraged my mother to work in a society that was not the most supportive of working women. From him, I learnt to be perceptive and assertive, and to always care for others before myself. My mother is the woman I strive to be everyday - balanced in her pursuit of career and management of family, confident yet caring and always down to earth and grateful for life's blessings. She has also taught me never to compare, urging me to be my own person and define success in my own terms."

Favourite RGS Tradition

"Badge Initiation and the Tealighting Ceremony would always have a special place in my heart because of Year 1 Orientation 2015. It was the first time the ceremony was held in the evening, and so we had to plan it from scratch. While we anticipated a lot of hiccups, on the actual day, the ceremony was simply magical - seeing the whole amphitheatre lit in a sea of tealights was so moving. To me, it is a legacy left behind by the batch of 2015 - with each of us passing the baton on to the next batch, showing how each and every RGS girl plays a crucial role in the Rafflesian family."