

Profile: Batool Asadi, Modeling Mission Motivation in Balochistan, Pakistan (Assistant Commissioner)

“We all have to bring change”

Batool describes herself as “a bit rebellious—I am a rebellion.”

She is close to her family and devout in her faith, but that has not stopped her from challenging the norms enshrined in both. “I come from a very conventional and traditional family. My father is a religious scholar, my brothers are religious. Being in a patriarchal society, we never had that agency that since childhood I felt that I needed.”

Growing up, Batool faced many restrictions – “You cannot wear this, you cannot go there... You cannot talk to males.” This never sat well with Batool, who thought, “Whatever I want to wear, I should be able to wear it. If I want to study some subject that is forbidden, I should be able to do it unless I am convinced not to do that.” With the stern clarity of someone who does not take this lightly, she said to her parents, “I *should* have this liberty” and “I should have liberty to distinguish as to what is wrong and what is right rather than being dictated ‘do something’.”

She continues, “I always wanted something more for my life. I wanted to test myself. I wanted to know what I can do. I want people to know me, Batool, in her own capacities as a talented person.” As a result, Batool has made “very, very different choices. I’m the first person [in my family] to be a civil servant through competitive exam. I was the first person to be in Oxford”, where she is taking a career break to study for a Masters at the time of this interview.¹

She was attracted to the civil service because she wants to change things for the better. “When I was in university, during our different talks, I used to criticize government policies. And usually, I used to think that, ‘am I going to do this? The whole of my life talking with students and cribbing on what government is doing and I’m not able to do anything about it? I’m just an outsider?’ So, apart from the prestige part I wanted to be part of civil service. I wanted to see if I could do anything.” There is every reason to believe that she could in fact have done anything she put her mind to; some quick research shows (she is far too modest to have brought this up herself) that the year Batool took Pakistan’s civil service exam, she ranked 21st amongst approximately 14,000 test-takers.²

Once in the civil service Batool sought an assignment back home in rural Balochistan, “nearer to my heart.” Some of her classmates would call her home region “backward,” and preferred to find more comfortable roles in stable, wealthier regions. Batool was motivated to go where things were hardest – where she could make the biggest impact. “When I criticize something, when I criticize corruption, when I criticize some social evil, personally, I believe that I will always think—what can I do about it?”

The few women who are employed in the Pakistani civil service are mostly in desk jobs. According to Batool, they often feel safer in those roles than going to the field. When she made known her intention of returning to the field in Balochistan, many in the civil service objected

“No, you are female, we can’t do this. We can’t take this risk.” Everyone seemed to agree that it would be better if Batool would “just sign the files and help us with the file work.”

Fueled by her desire to forward her organization’s mission and her ambition to have an impact, Batool pushed to become the first female Assistant Commissioner to serve in the field in Balochistan’s history. Batool’s superiors and peers were initially reluctant to accept her at par with male colleagues; at first, she heard some people saying “she will do something wrong, and then we will highlight, you know, psychology of downplaying her good things and you know highlighting her bad things... She’s a civil servant. She will make a wrong decision ultimately, she cannot take this much pressure.” She remembers, “those five, six months were hell for me.” Instead of seeking to support and utilize the talents of their new mission driven employee, most of those surrounding Batool were waiting for her to fail. However, her will power and enthusiasm helped her win support of a few colleagues against the odds.

Fortunately for the Deputy Commissioner’s Office and for the people of Balochistan, Batool remained mission driven despite those difficult first months. In the absence of gender sensitive official support and empowerment-oriented environment, Batool turned to an alternative source of motivation: her connection to the citizens she was serving and inspiring through her work.

For every comment made to undermine her, a mother was saying “we want our daughters and our sisters to be like you.” When she saw the positive impact of her work, she was reminded that her actions mattered. Her tone shifts when she speaks about young girls who studied harder because they had seen her example. As we have discussed, cultivating mission motivation requires employees to believe in the value of their actions. The pride and responsibility Batool feels sustain her mission motivation. She is still amazed by the response she received from women in her community; “Young girls in Balochistan, when they are in their schools and they think that they can do something because I have been in those schools. They can relate to me, I’ve been there. They think, *‘If she can do this, we can.’*” She remembers mothers asking her, “Can you guide my daughter? Can I bring her to your office?” And that was my motivation each day.”

This does not mean the job became easy; for Batool being in the field means “you’re directly implementing government policies and people *will* react if they see a female officer is coming to their shop and she is telling them they aren’t doing it right or arresting them.” In the extreme, reactions include “suicide bombings. I’ve seen people like that when I was in the field. People tried to shoot me at gunpoint...It was insane, people are throwing stones at you. They are trying to torch your car and the police were always running here and there and being a female, you are all on your own. At that moment [I was confident] that I did the right thing. What is the worst that can happen to me? *I could die, people die...If I don’t die today, I’ll die someday. But if I die, it will bring some change...*People will start thinking that ‘we were doing wrong. We were in the wrong.’”

We ask if Batool ever thinks it too difficult to serve as she does. She replied in her calm, quiet, yet firm tone; “*If you want to change something, you should be ready to take risks.*”

Batool's story highlights the power of mission motivation in driving individuals to maximize public performance despite extremely challenging and risky circumstances. But Batool's experience also shows that mission motivation is not endless; it needs to be sustained, and encouraged by superiors, peers, and citizens.

Eventually, Batool's supervisors recognized and rewarded her mission motivation and competence, and they now support and empower her even when the job is still tough. "At times you forget your own inspiration. You forget why you are in civil service in the first place. There are days when you think, 'What the hell am I doing? People are chilling at their houses. They are home watching TV and at 9am or at three or at two at night, I'm standing on the street and making sure that the rubbish is removed or encroachments are removed.'"

Her response to these feelings is to refocus on the connection to the people she serves. "I never realized that I am inspiring girls...I never realized that the intensity of inspiration would be this much...When people started coming to me, I started feeling the intensity of my work, that it is echoing. People have their eyes on me, where she is going, what she is doing." Batool's connection with the women and girls in her community reinforces her mission motivation.

Her mission motivation is also rekindled by connecting with her peers. "I have a group of like-minded civil servants and friends and we keep pushing and supporting one another. I believe that in the later years, I felt the impact of the coalition, how important it is to have like-minded people around you and supporting you." As we know, peers who share a collective sense of mission empower and inspire each other to work harder. Peer networks can cultivate a broader sense of team and sustain Mission Driven Bureaucrats' commitment and mission focus. As Batool put it, "There are no individual successes. It is a bunch of, so many efforts, people from different quarters. I was very lucky to have supporting people."

Batool knows that she will have more moments of doubt about her ability to make an impact, but she will continue to draw on inspiration from her peers, from the little girls she knows are watching, and from her commitment to improving her nation. Her network will continue to remind her "that [it] is very important to keep pushing." What Batool feels her network reminds her of is something this book aspires to remind us all; "*You can do this. We all have to bring change*'."

¹ November 2020

² See <http://www.cssforum.com.pk/css-datesheets-results/previous-css-results-datesheets/css-2012-exam/68943-ce-2012-result-announced.html>