

NETWORK

GNLU student chosen for Rhodes and Schwarzman scholarships the same year

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MANSOOR HUSSAIN (52), who could not complete his matriculation, wanted his son, Hatim Hussain, to be a doctor. But Hatim wanted to pursue law, largely driven by the fact that he witnessed inequalities and injustices to his community while growing up in a Muslim minority ghetto of Nagpur — Binaki Mangalwari.

Having chased his dream and joined the Gujarat National Law University (GNLU), Hatim will graduate in 2020. The 23-year-old has now been chosen for the most prestigious Rhodes scholarship and the second prestigious Schwarzman scholarship, in the same year.

"Members of the Muslim community live in communally polarised societies. There are instances of double marginalisation where we see two levels of discrimination — those within the community as well as Islamophobic tendencies... The best way to settle the gaps between fractured communities is through a series of steps on education, political change and legal reform... I felt law is a great tool to reach out to more people and understand the inequalities and injustices in their lives and strive to find a solution. I had great interest in finance, too," says Hatim.



After graduating from GNLU in 2020, 23-year-old Hatim will pursue Schwarzman scholarship in China for a year before heading to Oxford.

After his graduation, Hatim plans to move to China for a year by August 2020. The Schwarzman scholarship, modelled on the Rhodes scholarship, involves leadership studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing for a year. "I'll complete my masters in global affairs by July 2021 and later will go to Oxford and start my Bachelors in Civil Law by October 2021."

At Oxford, Hatim plans to combine his two key interest areas — legal and finance — along with technology and it is at the intersection of the three that he hopes to arrive at solutions to issues of injustice.

This soon-to-be law graduate burnt the midnight oil by pursuing Company Secretary (CS) and Chartered Accountancy (CA) until the intermediate level, while pursuing his BCom-LLB (Hons) from GNLU by day. He attributes his ability to multi-task to what he inherited from his

mother, Shamim Hussain (47).

"For more than 10 years, I saw her teach at a school from 9 am to 4 pm. Then she would come back and conduct sewing and painting classes between 4 pm and 6 pm. From 6 pm to 9 pm, she would teach at a night school. She would also do all household chores, including cooking for the family. Most of my childhood I spent alone. It was a sacrifice that my parents made so that I could have a better life."

Since April 2018, Hatim has been working remotely with the Cambridge Center for Alternative Finance (CCAF), University of Cambridge, as a research assistant, looking at alternative finance mechanisms and regulations surrounding it.

"I got to know about the Rhodes scholarship in third year, after a senior at GNLU, Sameer Bhat, was awarded it in 2017. I had not thought about higher

education as I was aware of my financial constraints... I knew I could not afford it. I had a job offer from a law firm by fourth year. But then my professor, Ranita Nagar, asked me to apply for the scholarship in February. I submitted the application just a day before the deadline, July 31. By mid-August, the shortlist of 75 students was out, of which 15 were law students. The second round involved a specialised panel to test subject-specific knowledge. Subsequently, 16 students were shortlisted for Round 3 that involved a character interview by the Rhodes Foundation." His third-round grilling had eight panelists, including former West Bengal governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, sports lawyer Nandan Kamath and Dhvani Mehta from New Delhi-based think tank Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

Ranita Nagar, professor of economics at GNLU, who knew about Hatim's struggles, says, "I told him merit is more important than money... Money finds merit. He is a very hard-working and a good student and it was only natural for me to suggest that he apply for Rhodes scholarship."

GNLU director Sanjeevi Shanthakumar said, "As a university, we are extremely proud. He is the first student from India to be awarded both the scholarships the same year. GNLU also saw another student as a finalist

for the Rhodes scholarship this year — Hatim's batchmate, Samira Mathias. The first Rhodes scholar from our university was in 2017. Hatim's focus was transdisciplinary and GNLU stipulates 100 hours of pro-bono work, which I believe, carries some weightage."

Speaking of his experience of working with the Gujarat Chapter of Access to Legal Education for Muslims (ALEM), Hatim says, "In my interactions with a number of Muslim students and parents, I realised how the community at large is unaware of available government schemes and has further been disincentivised from pursuing higher education, because to them, striving for sustenance is the primary struggle."

Hatim also used to volunteer to teach children between classes 5 and 10 on constitutional rights. "We make it inclusive and interactive. We would have races where the students would be placed at different points of the track. At the end of the race, they would understand how unequal opportunities at various points of our lives are correlated..."

Hatim, who prepared case briefs and analysed cases under Justice SR Brahmbhatt of the Gujarat High Court in 2017, is currently working at the Supreme Court as a judicial intern under Justice DY Chandrachud.