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**Problems Faced By Women
In Advancing In Newspaper Management In Bangladesh**

By

Sameena Islam

"PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN ADVANCING
IN NEWSPAPER MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH"

- SAMEENA ISLAM -

Although the constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women barring discrimination on grounds of sex nevertheless women are not holding important positions in newspaper management as the management prefers to leave them out. According to available statistics from the Press Institute of Bangladesh about forty women are working in different newspapers in various capacities. Out of these, only two have government accreditation as senior reporters, two as assistant editors, ten are incharge of women's page (mostly part time) while the rest work as junior or senior sub editors. Women are not attracted to this profession, as was expected, although there is a department of journalism at the University of Dhaka. Interestingly enough, most of the female journalists who are employed and are working in different newspapers are not trained in journalism but hold general university degrees.

The very nature of this job involving odd hours of work, challenge and free atmosphere at the newspaper office acts as demoralising factors. Women prefer to take up jobs which are typically feminine ones such as teaching and medicine. Parents do not want their unmarried daughters to work in newspaper office which is an all male world, nor do husbands approve of their wives going out to write a report behind the photographers' motorbike or staying at office after the normal working hours till late at night.

Nor are women themselves ready to enter a world of challenge to cover rape cases, murder, or go to a morgue or spot coverage at any place and at any time. They prefer nine to

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five jobs with Fridays as weekly holidays so that they can be with their husbands and children. They do not want to be at the office while their husbands are at home. There are a number of factors for women not reaching the top in newspaper management, production or editorial in Bangladesh.

Education

Education is the key factor behind women pursuing a career. Bangladesh suffers from high rate of illiteracy which precludes access to new knowledge of skills and perpetuates the traditional role of women as wife and mother. The national literacy rate according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics as on December '86 is 22.2% while female literacy rate stands at 13.6%. This includes those who can just sign their names. Not even 5% of the womenfolk is educated in the real sense of the word. Of this, a good percentage study just for the sake of studying and not for taking up a career. They are too happy to stay at home and bid goodbye to books once they are married.

Job opportunities

The educated ones prefer to take up professions which brings good salary and security. As the government pay scale is higher than the journalists wage board, the former is more lucrative especially as it is much more secure with provision of provident fund, gratuity and other benefits. The bright girls prefer to go to the engineering or medical colleges while the mediocre ones come to journalism. The number of serious hardworking female journalists can be counted on one's finger tips.

Coupled with this runs the fact that number of newspapers is very low in Bangladesh. All except two, one in English and

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the other in Bangladesh are in private hands, most of whom have ulterior motives for bringing out the newspaper. They are more interested in maximisation of profit rather than in ensuring the minimum rights and privileges of journalists as spelt out in the wage board. The job in many of these newspapers is in the hands of the employers making the employees extremely vulnerable nor is the salary paid on time or in instalments.

A good many of these owners, prefer to employ journalists on consolidated basis as part-timers but make them do the work of a wholtimer. As opportunities are limited there isn't much choice. Employers prefer to employ males as they can work in any shift, be it day or night. Although there is a provision that 10% jobs in all government offices are to be filled by women, nevertheless in the government owned newspapers only six female work out of a total of hundred twenty five staff. Women are mainly employed to bring out the women's page which male loathe to do. Employers seem to believe that the fairer sex is ideal for dishing out recipes, writing on beauty treatment, baby care and on decorating the house. Beyond that they have nothing more to do or nothing much can be expected from them that is why women are not given any important assignments and are rarely seen on the management side.

They simply do not believe that women too are capable of doing serious jobs other than the typical women issues. Said a senior reporters of a Bengali daily who has been associated with her paper for more than two decades, even now I find that my colleagues have a hard time to accept me in their briefing meetings. When I first applied for a job years back in 1977 I was asked by my editor to work

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in their magazine section. For some reason or the other the idea did not appeal to me. I could not imagine myself being confined to the same room every single day. I did not jump at the opportunity which possibly the editor had expected. I kept insisting for a more challenging job. After much persuasion the job came, but till date I find that the management has categorically managed to see that I do not get the important assignments. I am always dumped with the humdrum ordinary jobs.

While working as a senior reporter with the New Nation I have encountered the same sort of thing. I was branded with women, children, health and other social issues concentrating mostly on human stories. When I first went on a spot coverage behind our photographer's motorbike it was news. Even now as I move up and down for my feature items I am approached by my colleagues to take them along as they think I should not travel alone.

Said an assistant editor of an English daily, "this is my fourth job in the last five years. At every place that I have worked, I find myself at the other antipode of my male colleagues. I am left to fend for myself as if I am a different species altogether. My colleagues believe, that I got the job because of my influence and family connections and not because of my qualification and efficiency. Newspaper is very much a male

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dominated world and unless the social attitude changes it will be difficult for the females to reach the top either in the news or the management side.

Said an editor of a women's page of a state owned Bengali daily, "we women are not ready to take up our profession seriously because of built in inhibitions. Most of us prefer to stay where we are. We are happy with our salary at the end of every month. We do not want to learn new things or except challenges. We are not ready to work at any place and any time."

The management takes advantage of this. They rarely send us abroad for refreshers course or for skill development training. It is the male who get all the privileges.

We are very much occupying the middle or the low positions in newspaper management, production or even in the editorial and news sections. It is not that women do not have the necessary skills or education but primarily our attitude of not lettering women come to the top that holds women back from reaching the top.