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THE YOUTH IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION

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Six indomitable women: Success stories in STEM

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There are many societal pressures that limit women and girls from building careers in science. "Balancing full-time jobs and homemaking is one of the main challenges that women face in our society," adds Dr Nova. "Some girls don't want to work after marriage, because they are not confident enough. Providing psychological counselling and child care support for these women is important, so that they are motivated to continue their pursuits. We need to promote the enjoyable side of science to young women and girls."

Achia Khaleda Nila completed her BSc in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) from United International University and MSc in CSE from Daffodil International University in Bangladesh. She started working as a junior software engineer

Achia Khaleda Nila

The barriers that limit women from building careers in computer science and technology are even more prevalent in the professional space, according to Nila. "In my first job, I observed that women are preferred in the graphics department. Hardcore programming was a 'no-go' zone for them, which was shocking," Nila says.

at a multinational IT company when she was a second year undergraduate student. She was able to manage both her studies and office work effectively throughout her university years. However, Nila came across very few female students of CSE and often times, she was the only girl in the classroom.

"Many of my female peers and juniors were not looking to take up industry jobs after graduation. Others opted out for jobs in completely

different fields, despite studying CSE," she says.

Many deeply embedded societal perceptions lead women in Bangladesh to not opt for studying or working in STEM fields, despite being interested in such subjects. "Girls are discouraged from pursuing challenging jobs in computer science and programming because they believe that they are not good enough and that such jobs are only meant for boys. These perceptions need to change," asserts Nila.

The barriers that limit women from building careers in computer science and technology are even more prevalent in the professional space, according to Nila. "In my first job, I observed that women are preferred in the graphics department. Hardcore programming was a 'no-go' zone for them, which was shocking," she says. Nila feels that women are neglected in terms of recognition and promotion,

even after doing exceptionally well. "There are many women in the entry-level CSE jobs, but hardly any in the higher-level positions," she explains, adding that women are more likely than men to take a few steps back—or leave the workforce entirely— once they have children.

Committed to empowering women and girls through computing and technology, Nila founded Women in Digital (WID), a social enterprise, in 2013. WID facilitates female creators who want to work in digital platforms to raise their profiles, reach their desired audience, and showcase their work. It aims to improve the design of products and services to better serve a more diverse population, and increase economic and social well-being by providing more women with stable and lucrative careers.

Today, the social enterprise operates an agency, tech schools, and an e-commerce initiative. Female

engineers of the agency work on IT products for international clients, mainly in Australia and the USA. So far, they have developed more than 6,000 websites and more than 3,000 mobile applications. They recently developed a water billing software for Bangladesh.

Young girls in Dhaka, Ramgonj, Kurigram, Mymensingh, and Nepal receive computer training at WID's tech schools. Their e-commerce initiative provides an international market for handicraft products made by rural women of Bangladesh. So far, WID has successfully trained over 5,000 women for jobs in computing and technology.

"The technology industry offers an abundance of opportunities to women in terms of flexibility and work-from-home options, among other things," adds Nila, who is one of the 23 Bangladeshi changemakers

to be selected for the prestigious Acumen Fellowship 2020, an intensive leadership development programme for emerging leaders who are building solutions to tackle problems around poverty and social justice.

After earning her BSc and MSc from the Department of Food and Nutrition at the College of Home Economics (under the University of Dhaka), Samia Tasnim completed her clinical dietetic internship at Square Hospitals Ltd in 2013. She went on to serve as a nutritionist and diet consultant at Kidz Care Bangladesh and RIAND Bangladesh.

"I provided nutritional therapy and counselling to children with special needs in particular, including those on the autism spectrum as well as those with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other developmental

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Samia Tasnim