friend, Dil Monwara Monu then assistant editor of weekly Begum, a women's magazine, to write for it. The first story she wrote was in 1978, a heartfelt tribute to Zahir Raihan, the talented film maker on the anniversary of his disappearance in '72. Begum's editor Nurjahan Begum encouraged her to write more on celebrities and with valuable tips from her friend Dil Monwara, Mahmuda soon embarked on a career that she had so coveted. Mahmuda became a staff writer for Begum doing interviews and starting a film page and an agony column.

In 1981, Mahmuda bumped into Alamgir Kabir, her teacher from the Film Institute who was disappointed that she had not entered into mainstream journalism. Kabir introduced her to Bichitra's editor Shahadat Chowdhury and it was in this popular weekly that Mahmuda started writing fiery film reviews that caught the attention of the readers as well as colleagues. Her witty review of the film Saudagar became the cover story and soon she became well known for her sharp and rather unusual style of writing . Mahmuda also dabbled with film writing scripts and even making a short film. Around '86 Mahmuda started working for Ananda Bichitra but was disappointed when she was not made a regular staff member. In 1988 Mahmuda joined ADAB and became assistant editor and later acting editor of its monthly journal Dev Features. Mahmuda quit this job and 1990 joined World View International as a videographer giving training on participatory video.



Mahmuda Chowdhury- pursuing a life-long passion.

But Mahmuda did not find this job challenging enough and was itching to use her journalistic skills. Mahmuda was offered a job at Robbbar, a weekly of the Ittefaq group. But the editor of Bichitra persuaded her to stay on at his weekly. It was then that she got her first big break getting exclusive interviews of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina after the mass anti-Ershad movement of 1990 for a cover story in Bichitra's special annual publication.

The next year Mahmuda joined the Daily Dinkal as a reporter but was assigned to be in charge of the women's page and film page and doing press releases. "I was very irritated but the chief reporter Shawkat Mahmud told me to be patient and later gave me serious assignments," says Mahmuda. She started covering rallies and meetings of left-leaning political parties which was just what she wanted having leftist ideals herself. It was at that time that Mahmuda got a whiff of the fact that CPB (Communist Party of Bangladesh) was about to break up. She promptly got an interview of one of the CPB leaders and the story was printed along with the leader's picture as a front page story the next day. The CPB stalwart denied his quotes in the story and Mahmuda was called by her editor to explain. But all the quotes were in her notes and Mahmuda was off the hook although a small rejoinder was printed in one of the inside pages just to pacify the leader. CPB did eventually split and it was Mahmuda who broke the news.

Being a woman reporter says Mahmuda is a constant challenge no matter how many years of experience one may have. "Every time a new news editor or chief reporter came, I have had to prove my worth all over again. Even though I have been doing a particular beat for years, a new chief reporter would try to put me to the desk or ask a junior reporter to accompany me as if I couldnt do the job myself. So I have had to fight with them."

For Mahmuda the fight to assert her position continues. She says that women journalists constantly have to face unsavoury gossip and sometimes harassment; but it is important to establish a good rapport with some male colleagues. "They trust me and will even fight for me," says Mahmuda,

Mahmuda adds that it is also difficult for senior women journalists like her to get jobs as most newspapers and TV channels want young female reporters. Mahmuda, however is not too bothered by the lack of job prospects. She is more interested in encouraging and promoting younger women to join the profession. "It is important for women journalists to be united, to interact and fight for their rights together," says Mahmuda. "Women journalists have to earn their respect; they have to be patient. There are many talented women in journalism but they have to stick with it. I think the future is very bright for them; women cannot be held back."