her by saying that the challenge that faced her was to introduce a new concept of a women's page. Shumana successfully whittled out a new concept for women's page. She headed a page that she called Anyopokhkho, meaning "the other party" and it hinged on journalistic reports and other newer ideas that strove to dispel the very concept of women as having a house-bound, attenuated existence.

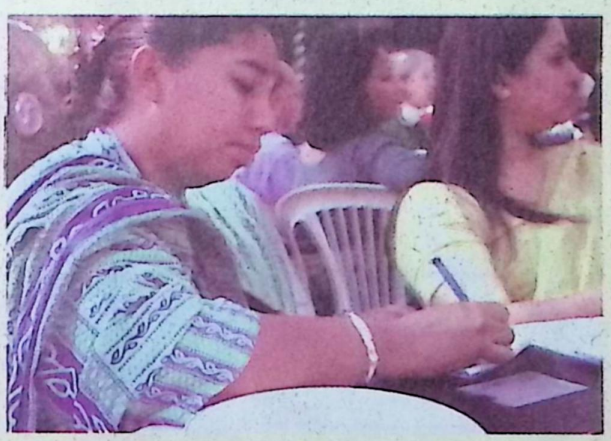
"The first lead that we decided on was titled 'why should not there be a page for men?' and a cross section of celebrities both men and women contributed," Shumana recalls. In her effort to break out of the stereotype she strove to fashion a women's supplementary page of which the contributors as well as the readers would be made up of both women and men. "I thought it would have to be relevant from the journalistic point of view, so I wanted the page to be a vehicle for hard-hitting reports on women-related issues," she adds.

In 1998, when a group of journalists broke away from Bhorer Kagoj to join the newly established daily Prothom Alo, Shumana too tagged along and was given the charge of the women's page that was dubbed Narimancho and the lifestyle page called Naksha. Since then her name has become synonymous with the former which give in-depth writing on women's rights issues.

But is there a need for a separate page solely for women she says, "My realisation is this that there are many social issues that remain underreported in the main paper, and you need a special page for that. If there wasn't a women page there would be a lot of women-related issues that would not be addressed in the main paper." However, about the content of the women's page she is in favour of a clear dictum. "The approach would have to be journalistic," she says.

After years spent at the helm of Narimancha, Shumana feels that her day-to-day emotional scenario has been reshaped. "Now I'm emotionally influenced by the plights of a lot of people. There are stories that we don't publish but I personally become involved in. Like a girl once called to ask for help in dissuading her parents from marrying her off at an early age, and I had to become involved. In fact we are providing advice to many women who are not willing to see their plights flashed across the pages of any newspaper but are in need of assistance," she says. So, Shumana's Narimancha has not only become a means for publishing elaborate reports on social discrepancies it also has become a platform for her to get in touch with women in distress. "I've recently published a letter from a mother facing extreme financial hardship in my page, which is an exception, just because I felt that people would be willing to lend a hand if they saw it in print' she says. She was right; readers started to call Shumana up to inquire about how they could help.

All women need is an agreeable environment "as they naturally posses the three qualities needed to pursue a career in journalism -- patience, a strong common sense and honesty."



As her concern for people in distress make her extend her role, in the Prothom Alo, too, Shumana's duty stretches beyond the two supplementary pages that she looks after. She is the deputy feature editor of the house, and all the feature pages that comes out fall under her jurisdiction.

Shumana got married in 1992 and it was not until she had her child, a boy named Srijon with a congenital respiratory problem, that she started feeling the pangs of guilt for not spending enough time at home. Her four-year-old son needs constant looking after, and Shumana and her artist husband divide their time in their effort to provide the best of care. "I went to Oklahoma for a training course and found that the major daily of the city had women in three major posts and one of them left AP to join the daily. When I asked her why she did so she said that on the ground floor of the office there was a children's corner where she could leave her little child while at work," says Shumana who feels that all women need is an agreeable environment "as they naturally posses the three qualities needed to pursue a career in journalism --