Women and Gender Studies: A career oriented subject

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THE Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Dhaka is the first of its kind in Bangladesh which offers 4-year BSS (Bachelor of Social Science) and one year MSS (Master of Social Science) degrees on 'women issues' blending the theories and real life situations.

The department is working under the 'ISS (Institute of Social Science) Project' of Hague University, Netherlands and 'Institutionalising Department of Women's Studies Project' founded by Kingdom University, Netherlands. Curriculum development, gender training, research and publication, student exchange, stipend and scholarship, visit to universities, conference and seminars are included as the jobs to be done in the projects.

In the first and second year of the Department of Women and Gender Studies, the syllabus includes subjects under the Social Science Faculty such as Sociology, Anthropology, International Relations and Public Administration. A set of courses has been designed to enhance students' capacity for comprehension, articulation, expression and writing skill in both English and Bangla. Along with these courses, Statistics is also taught to impart students with statistical knowledge so that they may use and interpret data and have access to computer and information technology.

From the third year, many aspects of women issues, theory, practice and literature, women's marginality, subordination and also gender issues have been incorporated with the syllabus. In the MSS level, development strategies, theories and change agents, evaluation and analysis of the situation and status of women in Bangladesh have been given emphasis.

The Department was set up under the Social Science and Arts Faculty by a decision of the syndicate of the University of Dhaka in March 2000. Professor Dr Najma Chowdhury, Professor Dr Najmunnesa Mahtab, Dr Sadeka Halim (Asst. Professor, Sociology) and more than 30 volunteer teachers of University of Dhaka worked relentlessly to form the department.

At present about 200 students are studying in 6 batches in the department headed by a chair and 8 full-time and some part-time teachers. The department appoints part-time teachers as and when necessary. There are 3 project teachers who work for the research projects of the department. The department has a specially constituted Coordination and Development Committee responsible for planning development activities of the department. There is also a specially constituted Academic Committee to oversee matters relating to the academic activities of the department.

Students are quite happy with the teaching and learning environment, the classroom, teachers lounge, library, computer lab, seminar-room and refreshing room facilities. Tareq Jubayer, a student of the department said, "I'm happy I joined this department because there are good academic facilities and also opportunities for scholarshis in various countries."

There are facilities to undertake research projects under some renowned universities of the world such as Queens University and the University of Virginia to name a few. Both the universities are situated in London. Not only the teachers, but the students of this department also can go there under scholarship provided by UK.

What is the future plan of Women and Gender Studies Department? The chair of the department Mrs. Ayesha Banu said, "Firstly we want to see that gender conscious people are placed in every sector of our country. That would help remove the existing discrimination between male and female from our country. To achieve the target we shall spread out the activities of the department in every corner of the country so that not only the women, but everyone can be enlightened with the light of equality." She further mentioned that M.Phil and Ph.D courses would start in the department within a short time.

There is ample opportunity in the global job market for the students of this department. Especially UN and the other renowned NGOs of the world are always open for the degree holders of this department. Opportunities for employment are also available in the research projects on gender issues under various universities.

Women and Gender Studies is a long established subject in all the developed and developing countries but it has been included recently in this country thanks to the efforts of the Dhaka University authorities.