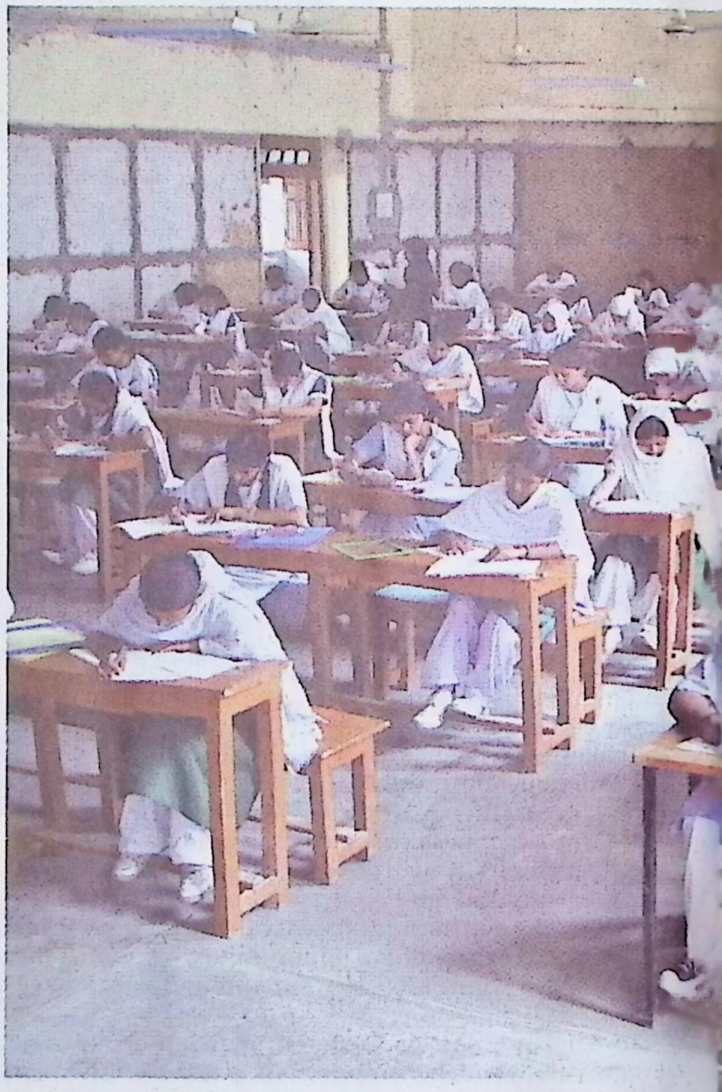
Bringing a Change with Education

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A couple of weeks ago, 32-year-old Dr Humayra Abedin finally emerged from her forced confinement and was flown back to the United Kingdom. The world was shocked at how an adult could be imprisoned by her own family members, merely because they wanted to solve certain 'marriage issues' with her. In spite of the developments made in the field of education for women in Bangladesh, women are still tied down by patriarchy, fearing the inevitable -- who will marry a girl adorned with a High School certificate, let alone an undergraduate or a graduate degree. The more a woman is exposed to the world of books, analysis and reasoning, the more her priorities shift from taking care of her husband's home to living a life of her own.

Recently, at a roundtable on Female Education: Achievement, Discrimination and Duties organised by 'Daily Prothom Alo' and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), representatives from several organisations, namely women groups, educational institutions, organisations for the disabled and groups working for the development of education amongst the indigenous people, shared their respective studies on the field of primary and secondary education in the country and if the female students are actually being benefited.

According to the CAMPE surveys, over the last three decades or so, the literacy rate, in Bangladesh, has increased, still it has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. In early 2000, the literacy rate among adults (15+ years) had increased 64% from 51% in 1997. The number of children in the primary levels increased from 12 million in 1990 to 17.7 million in 2000, while that of female students rose from 44.7% to 48.8%. However, not even half of all children were able to complete the five years of primary education. In 2000, amongst those who had completed their primary education, less then 2% achieved all the primary school competencies. A UNDP Human Development Report (2000) says that Bangladesh is ranked 146th out of 174 countries in terms of literacy rates. Access to quality and relevance of education still remain a major concern.

Presenting the keynote paper Dr Manzoor Ahmed of the Institute of Educational Development (IED) of BRAC University highlighted that enrolment of the girl child in primary education has been increased significantly while enrolment in the secondary level is 47.7 percent for males and 52.3 percent for females. Even then, a good chunk of the number of female students drops out later on in the secondary level of education. Many, even after acquiring the primary level of education, are not adept at basic reading and writing skills. One of the reasons behind the high drop out