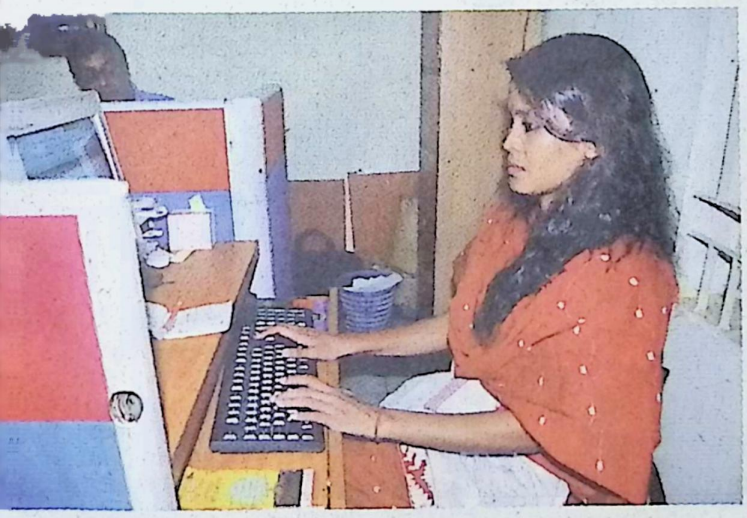


Nadia Sharmin – Harvester of Hope .

PHOTO: STAR FILE



Pinky Chowdhury

ist. Times are changing. Women are not afraid of those who do not accept them as journalists."

The life of a woman journalist in other cities may be more challenging than in Dhaka. Pinky Chowdhury a reporter for *Dainik Shuprobhat* Bangladesh, Chittagong, says, "A lot of people make rude comments because I wear jeans and *fotua*. When I went to cover a fire that broke out in the *Bastuhara* Colony, some people were angry to look at a woman with a TV crew. I became a journalist against the will of my family. Neighbours used to speak ill of me."

While attitudes of the society towards female journalists may take a long time to change, we may start with establishing a legal framework for ensuring gender equality in journalism.

"We need a comprehensive mass media law that will help eliminate discrimination of all forms against women in media. It will also make sure that women are not represented in a disrespectful way by the media", says Kaberi Gayen.

All said and done, how does one make sense of such an attack on a woman journalist in a country, the constitution of which guarantees equal rights for men and women? "Our society is going through a transitional period", says Imdadul Huq, eminent scholar and Chairman, Department of Sociology at Dhaka University, "Our moral values have suffered a sudden collapse. We do not have any role models to look up to. We have lost the ability to judge whether assaulting a woman while she is performing her professional duty is right or wrong. The transformation of our economy from agriculture to capitalism has not been complete. We are trying to walk on both sides of the street at the same time. Traditional values are becoming extinct while new values have not emerged. Although religious fundamentalism is on the rise in many parts of the world, I believe that freethinking will ultimately prevail. If we do not like what someone else is writing or talking about, we can write or talk back. Why do we have to choose violence?"

Sohan Khan, student of MA in Political Science, Dhaka University, opines, "Those who want to suppress women do not want our country to move forward. Women are contributing significantly toward the development of our country. We won in 1971. We shall win again. But we have to stay united and raise consciousness among the rural population."

When Kaberi Gayen went to see Nadia Sharmin, her student at the hospital, she said, "I intend to cover their future programmes. I hope they will respect me as a journalist and let me do my job with dignity."

The question isn't who is going to let her; it's who is going to try and stop her. ■