

# GOLDEN JUBILEE BEGINNINGS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2021, FALGUN 4, 1427 BS

## What real women think, what real women do

#EMPOWERMENT

SANIA AIMAN

"A whole generation worked to raise empowered women, but forgot to teach men to live with empowered women."

At every turn of women's rights movements, this shows to be true. A few weeks ago, there was a research report published about the increasing rates of divorce in Bangladesh. The published figures became highly trending on social media sites, and as usual, the comments section underneath became like a microcosm of the society at large, with

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all its ugliness on full display.

Many men and a significant number of women bashing "modern women" who seek divorces because they feel uppity, or get too big for their own shoes, women who are "too educated for their own good," women "too obstinate to compromise" etc.

The conversation played as if divorces were one party issues — only women get divorced. Just as all people are not made equal, neither are marriages, nor divorces. Some might have legitimate reasons, others may not. But the issue



is not the worthiness of a divorce, it is about the stigmatisation of the women who were party to it, it is more about the mindset about women at large. It is about a society that rebukes a beloved athlete on his wife's clothes, makes disgusting comments about the sister of another one, and normalises asking little girls questions full of dirty innuendo.

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From being censured for speaking about issues, to wearing clothes that somebody might not approve of, to studying subjects thought to be traditionally suitable for men only, to seeking unconventional jobs and pursuing personal passions, a large part of the society, both men and women, take it as their personal duty and jurisdiction to regulate other women's

lives and choices.

The point it seems is that women's issues are deeply rooted in the wider society, in its entrenched patriarchy, and patriarchy is rooted not just in men. But just as there are woke/aware women, there are woke/aware men, conscious about these deeply embedded women's issues, allies in the fight towards equality, the bases of which lies in the concept of a basic rights to self-determination, dignity and respect as human beings, often denied to women. The point is for us as a society to learn that women do

not deserve rights and protection because of the roles they play in men's lives as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, but rather, first and foremost, as human beings, equal in humanity to any man.

One of the key places that women have traditionally faced obstacles is in pursuing careers outside of the home, and outside of the norm. From not being able to complete their education due to being married off, to not being chosen as the child to be invested in, to shouldering both home and office responsibilities without support, practically each woman has a unique set of challenges. Only one aspect of these challenges are the ones thrown by the society at large — that of creating the pressure of fitting in, to cow down to certain set expectations. While many of our social norms remain age old, there also has been clearly evident growth. Just look at the increasing number of women in the workforce, in all sorts of professions. To get a clearer idea of these changes for women in the Bangladesh society, and the formal work sphere, let us peruse the thoughts of some women who have been the front runners in their time, reflecting on the issues that plague their gender.

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed  
Model: Arpita  
Wardrobe: Belkuchi, Sirajgonj, Bibi Productions  
Blouse: Zabin Iqbal  
Make-up: Md Hossen  
Styling: Zabin Iqbal  
Location: Bengal Carpet Mill, Ford Nagar, Dhamrai

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