



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

# Rethinking workplace gender equality

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Apart from witnessing history in the last year and a half, my friends and I have also been going through personally transformative experiences. That is to say, we have graduated right in the middle of the pandemic. Last night, the words that my friend said stayed with me, "No one ever prepared us for this part of life."

She was speaking about her chaotic first five months in the professional world. She had begun her current role with great enthusiasm as the company was renowned, especially for the field she studied in. However, within a few weeks, she had come to realise how much of a poor fit she was for this workplace environment. Keeping aside the absurdity of most offices in Bangladesh which insist on working on-site during the pandemic despite remote work offering high levels of efficiency, my friend had to deal with unforeseen challenges in the name of misogyny. I shudder to recall one of the instances she narrated to me in which a male colleague had said, "Hey, I am unmarried, so don't put a young woman on my team."

The ratio of women to men at the aforementioned

workplace was expectedly, alarmingly low. This led me to wonder about the existing challenges in the workplace that women continue to face to this day. Regardless of the beautifully curated care packages that HR departments of different corporations send to their women coworkers on the 8th of March, what are the real changes we have made to ensure gender equality?

The dangers of token gestures run deep for this very reason - what is meant to be a sign of the struggles of working-class women can too easily be converted into a photo op, as the employees themselves flood social media with pictures of being decked out in pink and purple. Sadly, that seems to be the extent to which some corporations' accountability exists. The situation begs for a keener analysis of the internalised biases we hold and social etiquettes that have been normalised.

Over the last few decades, we have seen an increasing number of women enter the workforce. This change must be reflected in deeper ways than mere statistics. Starting from our verbal language to behaviour and body language, a lot demands to be reevaluated to make safe spaces for women. It is not enough to say that more women are entering the workforce, but rather we must also ask, at what cost? Ultimately, are women paying a price simply to have access to all-boys clubs?

In 1984 the Government of Bangladesh ratified The UN Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Three articles in our constitution (10, 19, 28) are dedicated to eradicating gender inequality. Article 28(4) reads, "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of

citizens." This shows that the necessary laws are in place, however, a large question mark still looms over the execution of said laws.

We suffer from an unmet need for accountability measures to be in place, possibly in the form of regulatory bodies that oversee the workplace environments. Additionally, we are also tasked with embarking on the arguably more difficult journey of questioning and unlearning much of our beliefs, thought processes and language that we have inherited from the patriarchy.

## Academic Brilliance



Mashiat Aubhro, who scored 10As i.e. A star in all exams in O-level exams under Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) syllabus from Calcutta International School (CIS). She gave the credit to her parents and teachers for her achievements. Dr. Md Mofakharul Iqbal is father of Mashiat, who working as First Secretary (Press) at Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata and her mother Dr. Tasmema Begum is working as FEO under Fisheries and Livestock Ministry.



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