

HASINA NEWAAZ – 2005



Proprietor of
Orchid Printers

In the early 1980s, it was difficult for a lot of people in this country to believe that women can do serious work. For them to accept that a woman in her early 30s can run a printing business successfully was almost unthinkable.

The young woman who took on this challenge headlong was Hasina Newaaz, who over time has been able to break a lot of norms and change a lot of minds through hard work and drive. Printing is detail-oriented work and Hasina, being extremely meticulous and sincere, has naturally thrived in this field.

Hasina Newaaz was born in Bagerhat in 1951 in an educated and progressive family. Her father, Mr Abdul Hasib Chowdhury, also operated a press. He had involved her in his activities by taking her along to the presses and discussing his business at home.

Hasina learned to believe in herself at an early age as she was never looked down upon as a girl by her family. She finished her masters in Bangla literature at Rajshahi University in 1974 with stellar academic results, and after getting married in the same year, moved to Dhaka. Hasina still considers herself blessed in marrying a person who is equally progressive in his views and has provided unfaltering support to her over the years.

While settling down in Dhaka in the mid-70s, Hasina seriously considered her career options amidst numerous financial constraints. As she was

expecting her first child at the time, she decided to refuse the offer to join Bangla academy and, instead, invested in a typewriter to write to various international contacts in search of export opportunities.

A stroke of luck brought her in touch with a trader in Hong Kong who used to import live turtles from Bangladesh in 1977. Hasina bargained hard with this trader and eventually managed to get a trial annual order of 16 metric tons from him. Being extremely resourceful, she quickly found a group of people in Narayanganj to regularly supply her with turtles.

Hasina still remembers the trepidation with which she exported her first lot. She continued to do this for about a year up until environmental protectionists began protesting against the mass export of an indigenous specie.

Hasina started thinking of a second business idea. Again, coincidentally, she corresponded with a Singaporean trader who sold Japanese printing presses and, out of sheer curiosity, one day asked him the price of his presses. Now, at that time, the presses commonly used in Bangladesh were all German ones that were priced high at Tk 8-9 lakh. The Singaporean agent told her that second-hand Japanese presses cost around Tk 2-3 lakh which surprised Hasina and got her dreaming about one of her own.

After rigorous saving of every taka possible over the years, Hasina finally mustered up the courage to tell her contact to get her a press, which eventually reached Dhaka in 1982 at a cost of Tk 1.75 lakh. The introduction of Japanese machines saw changes in the whole industry and set up a new way of printing which was beneficial to a lot of people in later stages.

Several factors had attracted Hasina to printing: firstly, this was a field she was familiar with. Secondly, she felt that this was one enterprise which involved dealing with educated clients. From her father's experiences, she knew this was

a profitable profession and demand for printing would increase in future.

She also realised that she would not have to sacrifice her family life if she engaged in this, as she could easily help her children with homework and care for them during their illnesses as the presses were set up in a part of her home. But with her first press installed, Hasina now had to battle against the prevailing bias against women and

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secure her first work order.

And this was not an easy challenge. Whenever clients heard the person running this is a woman, they shied away. Hasina got her first break when she approached one of her husband's acquaintances and brought him over to visit the factory. Convinced by what he saw, this gentleman agreed to give her a small piece of work. For Hasina Newaaz, there was no looking back.

Hasina started receiving an increasing number of orders and her reputation for quality and sincerity spread, which again brought in new clients. But as soon as Hasina found her initial footing, she adopted a selective strategy. She wanted to work with clients she herself was comfortable with and ones with whom she would not have

to worry about payment. Her client portfolio today includes blue chip names like Square, Orascom, UNDP, Nestle Bangladesh, ACI, and Novartis.

Her set-up includes eight machines, 100-150 people, and an annual revenue number of over Tk 37 million. Hasina runs her show methodically and understands the value of appropriate systems, after having learnt on-the-job and from her multinational clients.

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Nothing has posed as big a challenge as the electricity supply these days, which has forced her to outright refuse many orders. Profit levels in this sector have also suffered as competition and cost consciousness have led to prices dropping every day. Hasina is enthusiastic about the future of printing in Bangladesh though.

"We are still working with second-hand machines and no one amongst us has the ability to buy a world-class piece of equipment. Furthermore, our labour skill and productivity could increase phenomenally with training," she says. These improvements will help Bangladesh enter the export market that China has conquered.

Having juggled well the Herculean tasks of a demanding profession and home chores in her early years, Hasina today lives contentedly with her husband, children, and grandchildren. She is ever cognisant of the importance of women's economic self-reliance in her immediate circle and insists that her employees educate their daughters. From her own experience, she also knows that, for a woman, support from the husband and family plays a vital role in the whole success formula.





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