

79

তারিখ ... ২ ২-AUG 1997 ..
পৃষ্ঠা . ৫ কলাম ১ ..

The Role Of The Woman Professional

Sylvia Mortoza

WOMEN around the world have been struggling for emancipation for so long that women's movements can now be said to have reached their zenith. Well organised and widespread, modern forms of communications now permits women in one country to stay in contact with women elsewhere. This makes it possible to formulate a combined and concerted effort at breaking the chains of women in developing countries where the traditional male-female role is still more the rule than the exception. One of the outcomes of the women's liberation movements has been that more and more women are opting for the professions outside those considered "suitable" for women.

Take the case of the Young Urban Professional woman of today that is increasingly visible in Bangladesh and other countries where the patriarchal system still holds. These young women can be compared to the western Yuppie of the eighties who put her career before marriage. Probably within the age group of twenty to thirty she is hard working

and devoted to her job for, no longer does she views marriage as her only aim in life. Her counterpart can now be seen in any Asian city, even in Japan and Pakistan. In fact the Japanese have a special name for her — the "oyaji" girl, but there the difference ends for she compares in every way to her western counterpart. In other words, the young professional women of today, whether in Bangladesh, Pakistan or Japan, or elsewhere, is the beneficiary of the new latitude being extended to women all over the world.

The movement for emancipation began last century with a demand for franchise and the right to own property. By the 1950s it had turned into the movement known as the "Women's Lib" which got underway in its truest sense with the not unreasonable demand for "equal pay for equal work." But this brought with it other demands like the freedom of movement and speech, and the right to regulate pregnancies. Until then, the concept that women are equal before the law barely ex-

isted, except on paper, but the freedom women had acquired in the western world, the outcome of two world wars which forced women out of their homes and into the munitions factories, could no longer be contained and more and more women were seen descending on the labour market. A comparable situation took place here following the War of Liberation in which women took an active part.

The proof of this lies in statistics which show an increasing number of women graduating from universities with an increasing number going on for higher studies here and abroad. Although in Bangladesh, only 2 per cent of the adult female population are professionals, this percentage is slowly but surely increasing as more opportunities for women open up. Only two decades ago only one in eight Japanese women attended a four year university course, the prerequisite for one of the better jobs. Last year, this proportion had risen to one in four. Women are also marrying later and the average age

for marriage for women in Bangladesh is now 22 years.

Although women tend to get laid off first in time of recession, this does not seem to discourage them from working and today 36 per cent of the workforce is composed of women.

Although there are still few women who have been able to climb up the corporate ladder there is an increasing hope among the professional women that they will achieve their goal of holding down a managerial position. Although most professional women in Bangladesh bow to social pressure and get married, often an arranged marriage, the divorce rate in this group is rising. But, before we condemn those women who put their job before family let us not forget that women who mix work with home life and bringing up children are in the majority and many have become the mainstay of the family. If someone stopped to ask them, they may find that these women are the most content among women for they can stretch their minds as well as maintain family stability.