

## Simeen's works a beacon of light

*Speakers tell commemorative meeting focusing on her crusade for women empowerment*

She worked tirelessly for women empowerment. Her research focused on women's work, status and social transformation. She also researched extensively on gender dynamics and social norms around women's work. She was not only meticulous as a researcher, but also a kind-hearted person who was always ready to help others. That was how speakers remembered Simeen Mahmud yesterday at a commemorative programme on the pioneering researcher from South Asia in gender studies and women's empowerment. They termed her demise an irreplaceable loss.



Mirza Najmul Huda, elder brother of Simeen Mahmud, a pioneering researcher and chairperson of the board of trustees of Central Women's University, reminisces during a commemorative programme organised by the institution on its campus in the capital yesterday. Photo: Star

Family members, eminent personalities, colleagues and friends shared memories of Simeen Mahmud during the programme organised by Central Women's University (CWU) on its campus in the capital. Simeen Mahmud was the chairperson of the university's board of trustees.

Professor Emeritus of Dhaka University Serajul Islam Choudhury said Simeen believed in empowering women. She was a true successor of late Prof Beggzadi Mahmuda Nasir, founder vice chancellor of CWU.

“She [Simeen] continuously worked for establishing women's rights. And, she will continue to do so through the works she did,” said Prof Serajul.

Rights activists Khushi Kabir said Simeen's works highlighted the importance of women's economic role in agriculture. She also wanted that women's unpaid work should be recognised.

“She always had the sense of responsibility towards society... her works are very significant, profound and extensive,” said Khushi Kabir.

Mirza Najmul Huda, Simeen's elder brother, shared the memories of 1971 in DU when she saved their father's life from a gun-wielding Pakistani soldier.

On the morning of March 26, 1971, Pakistani soldiers kicked open the back door of their DU bungalow and a soldier pointed his bayonet at their father, Dr MN Huda.

Simeen fearlessly walked up to the soldier and defiantly pushed the rifle away. The soldiers were dumbfounded and left with their mission unaccomplished.

Simeen believed in humanity, said her brother Mirza Najmul Huda. She also believed that women should have access to higher education. She always financially supported the needy students, he added.

Protima Pal Mazumder, her colleague for nearly 30 years at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said, “Women empowerment was the centrepiece of her research... She was one of the pioneers of gender research in the country.”

Dr Perween Hasan, vice chancellor of CWU, remembered Simeen's contribution towards women's education. She said Simeen played a key role in flourishing CWU.

Dr Ahmed Kamal, a member of the CWU board of trustees, and Samia Afreen, a representative of Nari Pakkha, were also present.

Simeen Mahmud, head of Gender Studies Cluster and coordinator of Centre for Gender and Social Transformation at Brac Institute of Governance and Development of Brac University, passed away on March 19 at a hospital in the US. She studied statistics at DU and medical demography at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She joined BIDS in 1974 as staff demographer and retired in 2008 as research director of the Population Studies Division. She was a MacArthur Fellow at the Harvard Centre for Population and Development in 1993.

Simeen had also extensive field research experience in rural and urban areas. She worked with many national and international research organisations, universities and donors.

She was the daughter of late Mirza Nurul Huda, popularly known as MN Huda, and Kulsum Huda. MN Huda was vice president of Bangladesh and a finance adviser while Kulsum Huda was one of the founders and vice chancellors of CWU.

Simeen's husband Wahiduddin Mahmud is a noted economist.