

Sayeeda Khanam: The Legendary Female Photographer

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Sayeeda Khanam, the first professional female photographer of Bangladesh, was born on December 29, 1937 in Pabna. She was the youngest child of her parents. She also had two brothers and four sisters. She became interested about photography when her elder sister's friend gifted her a Rolleicord camera. She had no opportunity to get institutional training at that time, but received the various international photography magazines from the owner of Zaidi's Studio,

which was located in Dhaka. These magazines helped her to enlighten herself as a reputable photographer.

Sayeeda Khanam was well educated. She completed her MA degree in Bengali literature from the University of Dhaka, in 1968. Again, she finished her second MA in Library Science from the same university in 1972. Besides photography, she worked as a librarian in the seminar library of the Department of Bangla, University of Dhaka from 1974 to 1986. After the Liberation War, she volunteered as a nurse in Holy Family Hospital for few days.

She started her career as a photojournalist in the 60s with the periodical *Begum*, staying on as a member of the prestigious magazine for over 50 years. Her photographs have been published in several national newspapers and she covered many national and international seminars. As a freelance photographer, her main endeavour was to visit places in search for pictures. She travelled to many places she to take photographs, including Kolkata and Darjeeling.

Sayeeda Khanam acquired many national and international awards which include All Pakistan Photo Contest in 1960. She also got a UNESCO award in 1985 and the Anannya Shirsho Dosh award in Dhaka. Sayeeda Khanam was very devoted to her photographs, she used to reflect her photos as her personal project. Moreover, she worked hard to create a special engagement with each of her own photographs.

Her photographs have been exhibited in different galleries around the world. She has also had three solo exhibitions exclusively focusing on Satyajit Ray, his films and life. Besides Ray, she also did portraits of figures such as Queen Elizabeth, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, Mother Teresa, Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She was a lifetime member of Bangladesh Mahila Samiti and Bangla Academy. Sayeeda Khanam also wrote a number of books, articles and literary pieces. Some of her books are *Dhulomati* (1964), *Amar Chokhe Satyajit Ray* (2004), *Smritir Poth Beye* (2011). She was a lifetime member of Bangladesh Mahila Samiti and Bangla Academy.

Nowadays, female photographers are very common in our society, but Sayeeda Khanam's journey was not smooth. She struggled at every moment to establish herself as a photographer. Her dedication helped tremendously to remove the barriers for today's young women to become photographers.

Sayeeda Khanam, the legend, breathed her last on August 18, 2020, after suffering from age-related complications.

Works Cited

1. [In memory of Sayeeda Khanam: The girl with a Rolleicord | The Daily Star](#)
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3. <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/sayeeda-khanam-first-female-photographer-the-country-no-more-1946921?amp>