

Areeba Falak

Areeba Falak's room is bright and airy. The space is a large dining room she uses to eat with her husband at night. But during the day, she works from home. She began her career as a journalist and was one the youngest TV reporters in India in her early 20s. She married at 27.

In the corner, Falak, a 29-year-old Muslim woman working editorial program manager at The Times of India, sits on a table chair, typing on her laptop with a determined expression on her face. A small foldable table is placed next to her (which she sometimes uses when she feels like sitting on the rug). Falak stacks her documents around her work area and settles in for a day of editing word files.

"My choice to be a working professional is two-fold: love and instinct. One is the love for my trade, i.e., media & journalism, and the other is the instinct to build my identity in a big world," she said.

Falak's love for media and journalism started in her teens. She was always curious about the world outside her own comfortable upbringing.

She said journalism was a chance to expose herself to different cultures. "I had always been curious about the world outside the realm where I was raised as a child," she said. Falak believes that she developed a go-getter attitude towards things she wanted to do because she understood that if she didn't push, it wouldn't happen.

Falak said choosing media and journalism as her industry was an organic decision. During her undergraduate, she became the youngest person at her local radio station to win a radio jockey competition. Despite being discouraged by her peers who told her that women in the media are exploited, she came to the profession naturally.

Falak said she desired to live differently than most women around her, who had limited or no control over their lives because they lacked financial independence. "This became the second driving factor in my decision to be a career woman," she said. "My appreciation for different cultures and my need to be my own person led to the decision to be a career woman."

Falak believes everyone should be allowed to make their own choices regarding religion and culture. "I don't wear hijab, and I support the right of an individual to choose what they want to/don't want to wear," she added.

Although conservative gender roles, especially in Muslim families, made Falak skeptical about marriage, her perception changed when she found a progressive man who knew how to balance home and work.

"After marriage, I didn't change my surname," she said. Even now, very few women in India continue to use their maiden names. Falak and her husband distribute finances and household chores equitably. "I continue to grow in my career and am financially independent," she said.