A Woman's Place

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PHOTO: AFP

American women continue to protest against gender inequality as seen in these pictures, one from 2011 and the other from 1971 New York.

Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.

– British suffragist and journalist Rebecca West

Equal rights for men and women – the fundamental principle of feminist movements across the globe – are yet to be achieved in Bangladesh. At a glance the outside world will see that the country has improved access to education for girls, reduced infant and maternal mortality by half, and had two women rulers for 22 years of its 42-year history. These are by no means things to scoff at, but the reality is these 'achievements' are tiny compared to what is left to deal with. Many areas of women's rights are still to be addressed but more shockingly, to be at least taken seriously.

'Feminism is a western concept that doesn't work with our culture' is a common ignorant excuse used to undermine the work of non-western women's rights activists and feminists when they have pointed to the examples set by equality-advancing countries. Men and women who have campaigned for gender equality for over a century do not subscribe to a notion that belongs to a certain geographical location. Feminism is a concept continually trying to establish itself within western culture. It is a universal ideology that women are no different to men in flesh, bone and potential and therefore should not be treated as second class citizens with fewer rights. It is true that western countries have visibly improved the quality of women by increasing their legal and political rights and encouraging social equality but this does not mean that their fight for real equality is over. Stereotypes, sexism and patriarchy still perpetrate gender inequality in almost every country.



US President Barack Obama is one of the most famous men to point out you don't have to be a woman to be a feminist.

The idea that a woman's place is still in the home, a norm in Bangladesh, is considered an outdated stereotype in the western world but the fact it is the punch line of many jokes involving women allows it to subtly continue sexism and gender inequality in western society. Another golden gem is the idea that women have to choose or prioritise between motherhood and a career. In