International Women's Day

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The 8th of March holds a special significance for me. Not only is it International Women's Day (IWD) but it is also the day my youngest daughter was born. She came into the world with a mind of her own and a feisty temperament and over the years we have watched her develop into an independent and free spirited young girl with big dreams and aspirations. I sometimes wonder whether this drive has something to do with the date she was born on. I also wonder whether she realises the importance the day holds for women around the world.



International Women's Day is a day to celebrate the progress that is being made in addressing women's rights across the globe and it is an opportunity to honour the achievements made by women in the economic, social, political and global arena be it in the past or present. This year's UN theme for IWD is "Equality for women is progress for all" and one particular name that comes to mind in the context of Bangladesh is Begum Rokeya (Roquia Sakhawat Hussain) who believed in women's rights and gender equality. She was one of the first female activists and social reformers to establish female education in an undivided Bengal in the early twentieth century. Renowned as a prolific writer, she wrote many articles, novels and short stories advocating the emancipation of women. Despite being born into a conservative upper class Bengali Muslim family, Begum Rokeya fought for gender equality and did not let the limitations that society put on her stop her. She is an inspiration to us all.

I always consider myself to be one of the fortunate ones. I was given the gift of free will and the opportunity to think and choose for myself. The guidance was always there from my mother but life decisions were my own. Being the mother of two daughters, I want to give them the same opportunities in life that I had and instil in them the idea that being a woman should never be a hindrance but a strength. Sadly this is not the case for countless women around the world.

Unfortunately to our shame, even in this day and age where human beings have managed to become technologically, scientifically and medically advanced and consider ourselves to be the superior species, women are still being persecuted and discriminated against every single day.

Whether it is in the East or West, it is not uncommon to hear of gender inequality in the work place