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"You don't have to remind a flower when its time to bloom is near; it has been preparing for it all of its life."
— Matshona Dhliwayo, author

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WORDS FOR THE YOUNG

History Teaches Us Nothing

I would like to share some of my thoughts after reading the article "History teaches us nothing" published on 27th January, 2017 in Star Weekend. Alice Walker an American author told "All history is current; all injustice continues on some level somewhere in the world". The massacre on Rohingya muslims and the ethnic cleansing are ardent examples of this quote. After the Second World War, the UN was established to ensure world peace by preventing any powerful nation from waging war.

However, it failed and now it seems that five Security Council states are controlling every step of this global platform. As a result, now in 2017, we are going through one of the most turbulent times in recent history. There is war going on in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. Nationalistic extreme ideologies are on the rise which is fuelling genocide like the Rohingya massacre. We have not seen such a large number of refugees fleeing for their lives since the Second

World War. And, due to involvement of the superpowers in these bloody conflicts, the UN can do little to restore normalcy and peace in these regions. As the UN has failed to ensure security and peace in different parts of the world, I think regional network between countries should be developed and strengthened to ensure bilateral and multi-lateral relationships between nations to avoid conflict and war.

Norman Hossain Khandker
Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet

A Life Changing Journey

The article titled 'A Life changing Journey' published in February 10, 2017 was quite an inspiring piece as it told a moving story of an NGO named It's Humanity Foundation (IHF). As I was reading the article, I learned how the organisation and its founders faced hundreds of obstacles and solved them one by one. I found it the passion of the founders and their determination to help spread education for underprivileged children truly inspiring. There are millions of street children in Bangladesh who are growing up without education and proper nutrition. However, they are an



PHOTO: COURTESY

Bengali Literature for Children

After reading the cover story "Bengali Literature for Children" published on 17th of February, 2017, I felt the writer has addressed issues we have neglected for too long. As a mother of two children, aged 5 and 3, whenever I would take them to Ekushey Boi Mela, I too have felt the need of a much better handling of children's Bangla story books. I wish to enrich my son's and daughter's minds by providing them with quality Bangla literature books that would also capture their attention. I hope, the concerned authority would take this cover story into account and step forward towards making the necessary changes.

Naila Parveen
Zhigatola
Dhaka

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

OPINION

There is a lot of contemplation over this word. Whether it is what it means in the books, or whether each person modifies it according to their own needs, the ideology behind this word always seems to be up for grabs for each person who claims they are or they are not one.

Feminism. What does it mean?

Feminism is more than just an ideology. It is a belief. It is a way of life.

It is a melting pot of political and social movements, and principles that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. Feminism is the ultimate weapon to fight patriarchy. But in order to understand that, people have to accept first that almost the entire world is heavily patriarchal.

Even in this century, there are people, even women themselves, who very blatantly utter 'I'm not a feminist' without a full grasp on what the gravity of these words can be. And then there are the others, who proudly claim that they are 'feminists' but forget the cultural context of who they are and where they belong. Each nation and society has different struggles to deal with, especially women. Before we delve deeper into the problems, knowing the history of feminism is more than just vital.

It dates back to when feminism, by different activists and scholars, had been divided into three 'waves'. It began during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, through the intense struggle and fight for women to vote in the United Kingdom and United States of America.

Voting is indeed our right now. Yes, every election we proudly come back with the blue marks on our thumbs, showing off that we too had a say in who should govern us. But did we know how much of a fight women had to put up for this to become a reality for us? Before we cast our vote, before we decide who will lead us, do we think about how we got here?

In 1917, the WIA (Women's Indian Association) was established, which worked to bring the right for women to not only vote, but also have the right to hold parliamentary office on the same basis as men. In Bengal, success depended on middle-class women, who came from the fast-growing urban elites that supported European ideas. By showing how they could partake fully in nation-building by having voting power, the women leaders in Bengal linked their movement to a more restrained nationalist agenda. They tactfully evaded attacking traditional gender roles by arguing that traditions could co-exist with political modernisation. The British Raj enacted equal voting rights for both men and women in 1947, after facing opposition from women leaders regarding segregated electorates. Since 1947, even after Bangladesh being a part of Pakistan at the time, women have had

'I AM NOT A FEMINIST'

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



equal suffrage, and have reserved seats in the parliament.

Despite having had these rights from the time of our liberation, we often forget that women all across the globe have had to struggle for every single woman existing today. When we, very easily, dismiss the term 'feminist' or turn it into 'feminazi', we, unknowingly,

disregard and disrespect those very women.

We disregard and disrespect ourselves.

What the women had fought for even earlier in our region dates back even further. Culturally, the discriminations faced in the sub-continent went beyond the right to vote. During 1850-1915, the difference between the sexes was more or less taken for granted. Their roles, functions, aims, and desires were assumed to be different. Thus, they were not just to be raised differently, but treated differently as well. Ultimately, this led to early women's rights movements. When the organisations and campaigns began forming, they sought to fight for women's right to speech, education, and liberation- things we sometimes take for granted.

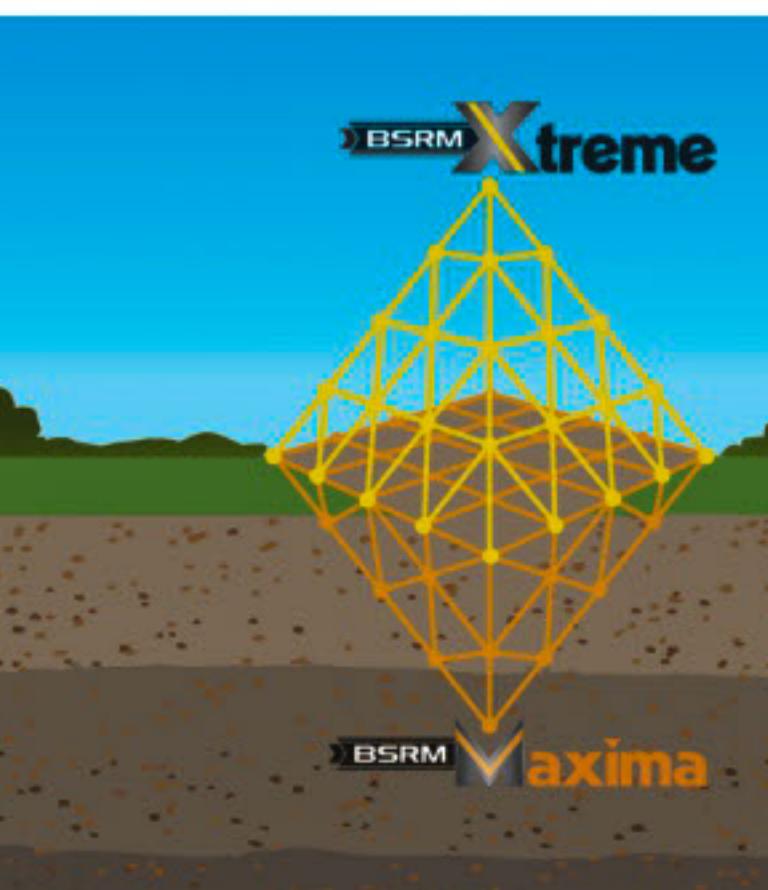
Back then and even now, women have bigger problems and struggles than 'walking in heels'. You may fight for the right cause, have the principles, but context matters, whether you like it or not. Your social surroundings dictate what problems you may be facing and why. A woman living in Korail slum faces different problems when compared to mine, living on an upscale street in Dhanmondi. At the end of the day, we have to look at the bigger picture- safety, equality, and liberty for all genders, of all classes, of all religions, and of all races. Throughout the course of time, the definition and ideologies of feminism have changed according to day. With each new year and each new generation, new problems begin sprouting, and old problems are sometimes, though quite seldom, solved. But the goal of feminism always remains the same- equality and the right to choose what you want to do. And to achieve that equality, our first target must be to remove patriarchy and patriarchal behaviours- whether on the streets, in the office, or in your own home.

There is a very ignorant premise where women who choose to raise children are considered 'weak', women who like to go to the kitchen and cook for their family, spineless. In my understanding, feminism is NOT about having to choose work over family, it is not about choosing not to cook; it is not about not wearing make-up and high heels- it is about choosing to do what feels right for you.

Whether you want to raise your children at home, or work a 9-5 job- you should be able to choose. Whether you want to get married, whether you want to have children at all or not- you should be able to choose. Whether you want to go to the kitchen or not- you should be able to choose. This ability to choose for yourself and make your own decisions is what feminism is about.

And whether you like to hear this or not, a man, woman, or transgender, if you personally believe that all genders should have political, economic, and personal equality—you are, in fact, a feminist.

Be a proud one. ■



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