

MITHILA

On #MeToo movement

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND MASCULINITY

In a recent interview with Rafi Hossain, Rafiath Rashid Mithila talks about gender related social issues and her initiatives to address them.



Rafi Hossain: Welcome to *Uncensored with Rafi Hossain*, today my guest is Mithila. Mithila, how are you?
Mithila: I am very well, Rafi Bhai. I hope you are doing well too.
Rafi Hossain: I am doing very well. I feel especially good as you are on my show today.

Mithila: I feel like everyone should know just how far we go back. I know you since my childhood.

Rafi Hossain: This is the second time we have had you on this show, and I know that the previous episode with you on it has nearly 4 lac views. This shows just how popular you have become. What do you think is the reason behind you achieving such stardom?

Mithila: Honestly, I don't know Rafi Bhai.

Rafi Hossain: But you do know that you are extremely popular?

Mithila: I feel this from time to time. Like when I meet people, or when I'm walking down the street. Like you said, my interviews get a lot of views on *YouTube*. I really appreciate all the love I get from my fans, but I am confused about why I get so much attention. But the fact that people spend their time watching my interviews on *YouTube* really makes me feel blessed.

Rafi Hossain: In your last interview you spoke about feminism. After your previous interview, I received a lot of emails and messages about it. They were mostly positive ones, but I received some which were against it as well. This made me realize that there are still a lot of people who have not properly understood feminism. So tell me something, do you truly consider yourself as a feminist?

Mithila: The thing is, to me the definition of feminism is quite simple. I do not want to be discriminated against, and I do not want anybody to feel discriminated. I want equal rights for women. To me, that is feminism. And that is why I consider myself a feminist.

Rafi Hossain: But has the situation improved?
Mithila: Of course. As everyone knows, I work at BRAC; there we started a campaign called *Redefining Masculinity*. We realized that if we want to talk about feminism, we must talk about masculinity. What exactly is masculinity? We believe that boys are stronger and smarter than girls. Boys have been taught that they can't cry as it is considered girly. This resulted in boys being forced to suppress their emotions. Our purpose was to redefine masculinity, and find out what the real meaning of masculinity is.

Rafi Hossain: So you took a part in that campaign?
Mithila: Yes, definitely. As you know, I have always had an active part in feminist movements, be it with BRAC or from my own personal standpoint. I feel that if we are to create a society with equal rights, then men and women have to work together side by side. We must also redefine the roles given to women by society, and the misconception of masculinity.

Rafi Hossain: Do you think women in our media industry face gender discrimination?

Mithila: Discrimination happens in all

sectors, not just in the media industry. But, such incidents have seen a significant decline now, due to the awareness that has been created to ensure gender equality.

Rafi Hossain: People at *Cannes Festival* and the *Oscars* have come forward with the stories of them being exploited, they have become much more vocal.

Mithila: It is all due to the #MeToo movement. Many women are coming forward now to share their stories of struggle and oppression.

Rafi Hossain: #MeToo is not just about physical assault, it's about women in general and the discrimination they face every day. Do you think gender discrimination has declined after the #MeToo movement?

Mithila: Since most of the people I know in the media industry are very vocal, they are not subjected to this exploitation. I have seen many colleagues come forward and post their stories of harassment and abuse with the #MeToo movement. Due to this, the perpetrators are now scared. People have become more vocal than ever. My organization works on gender issues and child protection, so I know that all the development organizations are working on eliminating these problems. I am seeing a lot of positive changes occur, and hopefully these problems will soon be a sad relic of the past.

Rafi Hossain: We translated a part of a letter you wrote on this matter and published it on *Star Showbiz*. It made a lot of people think about this issue in a different light.

Mithila: Let me tell you about the letter. I wrote that on a *Wordpress* blog. The blog is a fictional piece. It may just have been inspired by the experiences of the people around me. I wrote an honest letter to all mother-in-laws in a very personalized way. I asked things like, "Did you not see your daughter-in-law being discriminated against? Did you not see her being abused? Did you not see her feel very sad?" I got a huge response from that. I saw many people comment about how they faced something like this regularly. I was very surprised to receive this response. I wrote it because I felt like writing it. But, this made me realize that girls in our society have to deal with this regularly. For an equal society, we can't achieve anything with only men supporting women. Women must also help other women.

Rafi Hossain: Let's say a woman who is educated but is a housewife has a husband who is being unfaithful. Can she get a job if she gets out of that marriage, or will she have to move in with her relatives?

Mithila: This was quite common before; a woman did not have enough financial support to stand on her own feet. That's why they remained in a relationship regardless of the abuse they faced. But now, since everyone is working, they can support themselves.

Rafi Hossain: I see a lot of women suffering in toxic marriage. What can we do to help them escape it?

Mithila: A woman needs a lot of support from her family and financial backing to some extent, as well. I have been very

fortunate to have always received support from my family. They have always given me unconditional love. If the family can give proper support, and explain to a woman that they will always love her no matter what, she can make the decision to get out of a toxic marriage.

Rafi Hossain: If a couple has children, it makes the decision to split harder, right?

Mithila: Yes, definitely. I did a radio show where we brought in single parents. Not only mothers, but fathers too. We talked a lot about this. What we mainly talked about was the fact that even though the parents have split up, they have maintained a respectful relationship for the child. It is possible to do this to make the child's life easier. I believe that a child will turn out better



from a broken family where the parents maintain a respectful relationship, rather than a household where the parents argue and fight with each other.

Rafi Hossain: We spoke a lot about feminism now; let's shift to a different topic. You said that you get most of your feedback on *YouTube*, so do you also agree with the fact that our television industry is facing a decline in popularity? Where do you think our television industry is headed?

Mithila: I have not studied this much, so I don't know where this is headed. But the truth is, people are very busy now. They don't know when a show will be aired. That's why they watch videos on *YouTube*. Like, the show I do, *Amar Ami*; it is first shown on TV, then uploaded to

YouTube. I feel like as technology advances, we must also move forward. We must use these new platforms to reach the audiences.

Rafi Hossain: Do you think television will switch to something like *Netflix*?

Mithila: I think that this is a global change. It will be an ongoing process. I must say the content we air on television are good. Now people all over our country have access to the internet. It may happen that people would not require television anymore. They might use their phones, laptops and computers to watch the things they want.

Rafi Hossain: If everything shifts to online, would you still be this interested in acting?

Mithila: I don't know really. Acting is acting. The feeling I get after acting is

judgmental? Let's say for example, if I do this show while wearing a necklace. We will get face so much backlash. But people won't say, "Okay fine, he can do whatever he wants."

Mithila: I think that even now we are very judgmental. We still like to give negative remarks on other people's lives. But it will change very soon. The world is changing, and people are receiving a lot more exposure. So people will adapt soon enough. It will take time to fix these problems. After a long time, we have ensured rights of the transgender community.

Rafi Hossain: I am very appreciative of what our government has done for this.

Mithila: Yes. This community was not welcome anywhere because they were not regarded as members of the society. Now they will get the opportunities they deserve, and will soon participate in all mainstream activities. They are humans too. They never received proper education, and were not allowed any basic rights. That's why they resorted to doing bad things. If they face injustice and discrimination all their life, how can they do positive things?

Rafi Hossain: You say you have a very routine life, but you still do so much. You are a mother, a corporate professional, an activist, an actor, a singer and even an anchor. How do you manage to juggle everything in your routine?

Mithila: I am not a very good host. I am very nervous when I do it. I do not consider myself a host for *Amar Ami*. I just sit down and gossip with the guests. This gave me a chance to meet people I don't usually meet.

Rafi Hossain: Is there a script for *Amar Ami*?

Mithila: No, there is no script for it. Arnob Bhaiya was a guest some time ago. He is actually a cousin of mine.

Rafi Hossain: When you brought him in, did you feel like you found him in a new light, especially since he is a cousin of yours?

Mithila: No, but the audience found us in a different light as they did not know we were cousins. We talked about our childhood, and people loved it. We got a lot of positive remarks for that. That's what I'm trying to do on the show.

Rafi Hossain: But why did you start doing the show?

Mithila: I felt like trying it out as I had never done this before. I wanted to see if I enjoyed it. I like to try different things in life. For the show *Bere Otha*, which was supported by BRAC, I didn't have to study much. It was about what I worked on, so I knew everything about it. It was a project very close to my heart. But I still researched before every episode to make sure I didn't say anything incorrect. The response I got from that was amazing. I really enjoyed doing that, and in the future I want to do more shows like *Bere Otha*, to educate parents about their kids.

Rafi Hossain: Do you have any message for your audience?

Mithila: To my fans, I thank you for all your support, and am eternally grateful for all your love.

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 By Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub