



INTERVIEW

An equal world is an enabled world

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Last year, I met Hameeda Hossain for the first time at a private party hosted for notable Dhakaiites. Of course, I went there as just a reporter to cover the scoop, rather than as one of them, but it was remarkable enough to be able to stand next to these extraordinary personalities. This year, when the interview of the famed human rights activist, founder of Ain o Salish Kendra, and a renowned academic was up for grabs, I did not hesitate for a moment before seizing the opportunity. And luckily, our meeting was scheduled at her residence.

Her home is nearly invisible from the street. To get to it, you have to go through a gateway, and then navigate a mini garden and several houses before someone actually points out to the actual residence. The one-storied building is somewhat classical, a true resemblance to the golden days: gigantic rooms, large paintings, shelves packed with books, and a study.

When I arrived, Hossain said, "I hope you didn't have a hard time finding the house!"

Face to face, Hossain has the same intensity and forthrightness, as expected from a human rights activist. We discussed many things, talked about the challenges of feminism; she shared her views on the discriminatory existence of class distinction, social injustice and much more.

LS: How do you feel about feminism? What does it mean to you?

HH: Feminism is a complex subject. It deals with many issues, from equal rights to personal rights. If you ask me however, feminism is more about the struggle to achieve justice in all circumstances; not only a fight against patriarchy, but also about class distinctions and how we treat others based on that perception.

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LS: During times when we can proudly say that we have achieved a lot in terms of feminist goals and rights of the women. There are people still looking down upon the expression and misogyny prevails. What do you have to say about this?

HH: Men criticising the feminist platform or anybody else don't actually understand what the struggle is all about! They think a feminist only craves for financial equality



– like 'if they earn Tk 10 then we have to earn the same' – something like that.

But that is so wrong. What a true feminist really wants is increased prevalence of justice, more tolerance to each other's differences, recognition of and paying respect to different ethnicities, paying heed to all social structures and valuing their rights etc.

LS: Let us go back to our point again. Why are so many domestic violence cases and rapes taking place every day when we have come so far in terms of establishing the priorities of feminism?

HH: I would not say that discrimination has increased over the years. It's just that women were too afraid to report assault in the past — today they are no longer worried and instead, choose to report cases immediately.

Today, they are not worried about intimidation, as they were in the past. And maybe that's why the reports have increased.

LS: Why is there such prevalent misogyny?

HH: There is an unhealthy level of competition between the genders. Men think that women are getting more preference at jobs, whilst they are being deprived of these opportunities. But what they do not realise is that these very women — also have a double role to play. They work in the morning as labourers and later, when they come back home, they need to cook food for the family and carry out other household chores without any support, since the concept of sharing housework has not yet been established.

It is for us to challenge this mindset! We must tell them (the men) to learn to look after their own selves as matured adults.

LS: Any other discrepancies from the aspect of feminism?

HH: Oh! So many actually. Where do I even start? Let's begin with the state; the largest representation of women at the government level is the mohila parishad. There, we see women taking seats based on quotas and following the dictates of the government which is largely male dominated, even when headed by a female lead. For a true representation of women and society at large, there should be more women in the cabinet.