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Rubana Huq

Ah, women!

March 7, 2011



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Excuse me, international women's day? What day? Which one? Hmm... the one where we arrange seminars, lunches, parade successful women, garland them, sing praises without having the basic iota of knowledge about their real lives? In reality, women are like carpets. Prettier ones may be passed off as the 100 percent silk ones, the coarser ones are ugly anyway and the stains in them are signs of their being used.

Women are also like mugs. All of us are.

I feel like a coffee mug in want of a lid. I feel incomplete without being topped by an endorsement. Without a seal of being kept warm, I violate my inner properties and promise of being the bearer of the rest of the world.

I am stirred by the violent teaspoons over news on stock markets, board meetings and even wars. I suffer spilt espresso every time a man in the house is callous enough to knock me down.

I am stirred, spilt and knocked down all the time.

And worst of all, they have a day to celebrate the woman in me...

It was so far my most tormented day in 2011. To make it worse, a young friend had called in to invite me over to address a gathering of women at a local coffee shop. She couldn't have chosen a worse moment. I don't believe in the day. To announce a day to honour women is a joke, particularly in this part of the world. Without betraying my emotions, I had asked her not to ever come up with such a request ever. I also sternly told her that if she wanted to have a ladies' lunch, she could easily do it without bringing in a cause to the menu chart. To this she replied and said that even men were attending, expecting me to be happy with such a non-milad-mehfil co-participation. I wasn't.

I could have told her that men who feigned to be friends of women have multiple angles to consider. I could have told her that bringing in men to the crowd would only mean a good mingling time, taking time out to celebrate a moment and a mistake as right after partying, the men would head back home to have their wives waiting to have dinner with their masters. Never mind, if she suffered from gastric ulcer pains. She must be a good egg. That's what they call us. We are supposed to be of excellent pedigree and we must behave.

Don't be shocked if I share with you what we still go through in our lives. One of our neighbours, a stunning woman around 45, gets beaten by her husband every week. Her

weekly dose of violence acts like a steroid. She's humbled while her husband struts around with no regrets. This woman is often seen at parties being the centre of attraction.

While other women resent her openness, little do they know that away from the buzzing scene she is the one battered to the hilt. There was a time, when she used to contemplate calling the police to lodge a complaint. But that never happened. She had her daughter to think of, her husband, her children and their endless family photographs in her corridor of memories.

There's another woman who had just celebrated her 20th year of marriage and has just discovered that her husband has quietly been simultaneously having two extra-marital affairs. She was overjoyed at the thought. "At least he has more than one; that only goes to prove that he is not serious about any of them", she said. What philosophy! What deduction!

Don't get me wrong. I don't equate women with deities.

I don't believe women are from a cleaner planet.

I think Golda Meir was prime minister of Israel during the 1973 war. Wasn't Indira Gandhi the PM of India when Emergency was declared? Wasn't Margaret Thatcher the PM of UK when they undertook their "police action" against Argentina? In her defence, the UK didn't declare war on Argentina as Queen Elizabeth would not sign the declaration. Didn't Boudicca go to war to avenge the rape of her daughters?

Didn't Henry VIII start a religious war over a woman and his desire to marry Anne Boleyn? Haven't the most powerful female leaders of our own region, including Bandarnayeke, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, and two of our very own, most powerful female leaders steer lands as they have wanted to, with and without the popular mandate?

Long ago, my mother-in-law used to tell me that her sons were like ducks. They could dry themselves the moment they left the pond while a woman would always be a captive of history. This concept hasn't changed much till date. Till date, my phone book has a special name for my partner: L&M, meaning: Lord and Master. In spite of the hilarity of our modern lives and pre-modern practices, we have ourselves created a post modern joke on women by celebrating a day as being their own.

Ask me frankly and you will be shocked. Once upon a time, our maid used to come home for work every morning with newer complaints against her husband. While her string of stories grew, I, the ardent audience realised that within a span of two years, she had married thrice. Astounded by her audacity, I questioned her action. Unshaken she answered, "Ki Kormu? Bhat dey na, kapor dey na" (What should I do? He does not take care of any of my needs)

Wow! So she hopped from one marriage bed to another, hoping to find her slice of bread, her share of wardrobe and finally gave them all up...in search of peace. She seemed more liberated than any of us at that point of time.

Women, today, just are happy without having to commit to men. The answer to why women are opting for late marriages and are even opting to become single parent by virtue of adoption is not a brain teaser. More and more, women have been coming out of their bottles; more and more the genes within their own selves have been rescuing them to confront their own fears.

I am not an advocate of celebration. Neither do I believe in a single day to register appreciation or glory. A woman in Bangladesh is yet to become a hero. By planting her front room, living room scene for projection on the public domain is not even a quarter-truth. Instead of investing in political rhetoric, we need to examine our own, individual ground realities. Only then can we sift reality out from fiction and take a stand against being celebrated for a day.

We deserve a lifetime, not a day, a week or an hour.

Rubana Huq is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group and CEO TV Southasia.

Tags: [Bangladesh](#), [empowerment](#), [women](#)

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1. Rumi on March 8, 2011 at 8:09 pm

so practical... I do support her!

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