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WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

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BREAKING BARRIERS: Dr Eaysmin Ara Lekha's journey to leadership and gender equality

The notion that women are not suited for leadership positions is gradually dispelled as society advances. Dr Eaysmin Ara Lekha, an academician, writer, researcher and social worker, has dedicated her time and efforts to addressing and actively working to improve academic standards and promote inclusivity throughout her professional life. As of 2023, Dr Lekha is the Vice-Chancellor of the well-reputed Uttara University, Dhaka, a position that has very rarely been associated with women in the past.

In 1992, Dr Eaysmin Ara Lekha completed her Bachelor's degree in Bengali Literature and Linguistics at the University of Dhaka, followed by a Master's degree in the same field in 1995. She explains, "My journey is rooted in my love for Bengali literature and linguistics. I've always tried to blend traditional wisdom with modern teaching methods." Subsequently, she earned her PhD in Linguistics from Jadavpur University in Kolkata.

Dr Lekha has been a part of Uttara University, Dhaka for a little over 20 years now, starting as a professor in

2003 and playing several other roles over the years as chairman and dean of the School of Education, Physical Education, Pro Vice-Chancellor and eventually being appointed as the Vice-Chancellor in April 2023.

Becoming the Vice-Chancellor marked a moment of immense pride not only for Dr Lekha but also for women breaking barriers in academia. She acknowledges the challenges she had to overcome, stating, "It wasn't easy. I had to and still have to face scepticism just like a woman in any leadership role. However, I used them to fuel my determination to prove that anyone can lead effectively."

Despite the challenges, Dr Lekha finds her work rewarding. She is driven by a simple desire to make a positive difference wherever she can —

academia, entrepreneurship, writing, advocating for social causes. Regarding balance in her professional life, Dr Lekha feels that each part complements the others, helping her grow as a person and contribute meaningfully to society.

Reflecting on the systemic barriers that hold women back, especially those not in powerful positions, Dr Lekha emphasises the importance of addressing these challenges.

She states, "I know there are a lot of systemic barriers that hold women back, starting from biased hiring practices to unfair pay and societal expectations. As a woman in a leadership role, I need to acknowledge these challenges and do what I can to address them."

Dr Lekha's long-term objective is to see a fairer and more inclusive society established in which people of all

genders and identities flourish.

On this International Women's Day, she encourages us to reflect on how far we have come and how far we still have to go. "Let's remain united in our pursuit of gender equality," she emphasises. "I have faith in education's ability to spur societal transformation. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to promote gender equality and empowerment are among my priorities as Vice-Chancellor."

For young women aspiring to leadership roles, Dr Lekha offers valuable advice: "Believe in yourself because you're as capable as anyone else. Find mentors and supporters who can help you grow, don't be afraid to speak up for yourself and your ideas. Be ready to face setbacks, but don't let them set you back."

Dr Eaysmin Ara Lekha is a trailblazer in the academic field, and her dedication to championing gender equality and inclusivity serves as an inspiration for everyone.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Courtesy

