

Feminism, a misunderstood concept today

“If the woman has the right to an abortion, why shouldn’t a man be free to use his superior strength to force himself on a woman? At least a rapist’s pursuit of sexual freedom doesn’t (in most cases) result in anyone’s death.”

- Lawrence Lockman (Republican)

Yes, you read it right. These are actual words uttered. Unapologetically. Not to mention, this is a snippet from a letter in 1995. Only 25 years ago. At least if it was during the stone-age one could say that humans were not evolved; still phasing from their baser instinct. Unfortunately, for this “gentleman”, we are in the 21st century where man is said to be advanced in all facets of life – whether social, economic or technological. And we do not take kindly to such ideas or people. Yes, Mr. Lawrence Lockman, was made to resign from his post at the Maine Democratic Party; but what is worth accentuating is the fact that after going through about 3,00,000 years of evolution, the “most advanced race in the entire cosmos” has managed to elect such a “gentleman” as a lawmaker who would voice their interests and opinions.

Unlike other politically incorrect statements that have space for ambiguity and interpretation and a maybe ‘He didn’t mean to say this!’ or ‘You have to read it in *this* way...’, Mr. Lawrence does not mince his words. He clearly advocates rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment or whatever name you want to call it. What is nerve-wracking is that he is not the only one. I don’t wish to quote the other ‘gentlemen’ for the fear of that you might just tear this sheet(s) of paper simmering in rage. However, there is a sliver of silver lining in this situation. Does the **#MeToo** movement ring a bell? Who am I kidding? This global movement has amassed force enough to upstage an India – Pakistan cricket match.

Started by Tarane Burke in 2006, this movement was founded to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly non-white young women, who were not so well off to come out of the trauma they had suffered. Essentially, the movement aimed to propagate the sentiment of “Empowerment through Empathy” - you are not alone. Majority of 2017 was bombarded with ‘**#MeToo**’ on Twitter and Facebook – two of the most active social media platforms. Just to shed light on how swiftly the numbers multiplied, here are some facts for you:

- The phrase "#MeToo" was tweeted by Milano around noon on October 2017 and had been used more than 200,000 times by the end of the day and tweeted more than 500,000 times within 24 hours.
- On Facebook, the hashtag was used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts

Having intrigued you with some overwhelming statistics, it is time to turn your heads towards the pertinent matter – i.e. its essence. This movement focused on the ubiquity of sexual harassment, assault and rape spotlighting the assailants and their horrific crimes, numerous cover-ups, eventual ousting and, sometimes, professional resilience. It gave women strength to come forward and be heard. It gave women a chance to stand tall in society without cowering in fear of oppression and judgement. It gave women the power to punish their oppressors. It gave women the courage to shut people up.

No wonder it gained world-wide recognition and became a global success; not just in terms of punishing the atrocious exploits but as an act of portrayal of upliftment of women who were made to believe that the pseudo-superiority of men was the truth. This success touched parts of our country too. From members of the film fraternity to politicians, almost every sector has been accused of using power of dominance to subdue women.

But like every fabric, while one side is woven in a mesh of colourful bright colours that are attractive and eye appealing, the underside is a picture of browns, greys and depressing blacks. #MeToo undoubtedly sparked a fever of awareness and justice being sought when it was launched. But things started taking an ugly turn when the number of people tweeting #MeToo multiplied ten-fold with women falsely accusing rape, merely to get attention and recognition. According to a study, the estimated number of false rape accusations can go beyond 10% of the reported cases. This has not only undermined the entire movement but also dampened that sliver of hope to be heard and acknowledged seriously in the patriarchal society. The gross abuse of #MeToo has led to doubting of innumerable genuine cases of assault and rape.

Imagine this scenario: You – a woman - are a part of society where even if you shout you are barely audible. So, you along with a bunch of similar people band together to **make** yourself be heard. Suddenly people who were despairing and had taken their way of life for granted get hope and join you too. Just when it becomes impossible to tune you out, a discordant

group starts singing a different song to a different tune and chaos reigns again. You lose. They win. Now, instead of just not hearing you, they are suppressing your voice too.

This is a classic case of feminism abused today; not just the scenario I asked you to imagine but the status of the #MeToo movement too.

This is only a one-of example; the appetizer before the scrumptious main course, if I may. But before having the fine meal, table etiquettes should be polished. Thus, to intensely debate the status of the #MeToo movement, the fundamental question that needs an answer is “What is feminism?” The nation wants to know!

Disclaimer (ideally which should have been at the start, but nonetheless):

All characters and episodes portrayed in this essay are real and a part of my life and any resemblance to anyone else’s life is purely coincidental. Neither the content of this essay nor the writer intends to outrage, insult, wound, offend or hurt any religion or religious sentiments beliefs or feeling(s) of anyone; nor do they intend to malign defame or slander any place, religion, country, community, or class of person(s) in anyway. The writer explains her point of view through real life incidents and is averse to formal definitions. Proceed with caution. Events may seem isolated, but they all connect so, kindly be patient.

Only the other day, all of my family members were generally pulling each other’s leg; parents asking typically embarrassing questions that none of the kids would want to answer truthfully. My father turned to my cousin and asked him, “You **boys** don’t drink right?” (implicating only my two guy cousins excluding us four girls). To him, we were never considered because as girls you are obviously not allowed to drink. Because if you do, what impression would you have before the society? Drinking for girls is clearly looked down upon. Admittedly drinking is not advocated, but for boys, it is not a taboo in the society. If a boy is consuming alcohol, society rationalizes this act saying ‘He must be having a glass of wine very occasionally. As long as he is not a drunkard, it is okay!’. Had it been a girl doing the same, people would have spoken about her morals and how her parents have not taught her right. It’s ironic how society has a drastically different view for two different sets of people for the same thing. And instead of tailoring the view so that it applies to all, they conveniently choose to make their minds narrower because it is obviously the easy way out. My point in this little-everyday-episodes is that my father should have asked the question to

all of us – the girls and the boys. Incidentally, the answer to this question is no. Then why bother with a rant if ultimately the answer is in negative? Well, it is a matter of principle. If for an inconsequential matter, a picture using the shades of misogyny and sexism is painted, the edifice where this painting is hung would rival the Leaning Tower of Pisa – an architectural extravaganza.

I present to you another episode that has eternally been a topic of debate and will continue to remain so, at least for India – periods. Save the few progressive households, most of India has a fixed rule to ostracize women when they are on their period. Just when one thinks that nothing more can be added to this negative list, new covenants spring up. The very basic unwritten guidelines include not entering the kitchen, no going to temples or any religious place, eating from different utensils and so on and so forth. Just about anything that makes a woman feel like an untouchable is the icing on the cake. The funny part here is that these views are majorly propagated by the females themselves. Out here, men will obviously not play the second fiddle and thus, they join hands with these female propagators. When I asked my grandmother the reason for following these so-called rules, she told me that this has always been the way of life. A custom to be diligently followed so as to speak. Unsatisfied with the answer and a tad bit indignant about it, I asked the same question to my mother. She too said that it flows from the past. But then she explained to me why it was that in the past in the first place. She said that women were the CEOs of the house; but planning and execution was both done by them. There was no concept of paid or unpaid leave during those days *and* Saturdays and Sundays were working. They were expected to work 365 days diligently; and knowing no other way of life, they did not think to fight for their rights. In this backdrop, knowing that you cannot overwork these people, the society came up with a fool proof plan to relive women for at least 3 days a month. They dictated that during that time of the month, women take rest and retire from all of their execution duties – whether it was cleaning, or cooking. This structure was sensible and compensatory for all the hard work put in by women. Ideally, the same should be carried down through generations. But what people did out of choice at that time, has become a compulsion today. The ‘why’ of the things has given way to ‘it is custom of today’. Logically, yes, the no cooking no cleaning rule for 3 days was an absolute delight. But as this concept has been handed to the current generations, added embellishments have taken away the spirit of the structure. Women were not treated as untouchables then, but they are treated as untouchables now. The choice to not cook or clean is no longer available to generation today. They have to do as they are told.

Some might wonder how on earth is this topic connected to feminism. It's an 'only-girl-thing' because boys can obviously not get periods. And for feminism there always has to be a male counterpart over whom we can establish superiority, right?

And, I solemnly swear that I am not exaggerating when I say that feminism is construed as female dominance over men by some. This sect of persons is entirely against the concept of feminism – some because they cannot wrap their head around women empowerment; while some because they do not know what feminism is. Today, the word 'feminism' is tossed about almost everywhere; and wherever used, it is sensationalized. In a world where everyone, save a select few, is a feminist today (because she said, I said), the word seems to have lost its allure. Everybody just assumes that their version and definition of feminism is a hundred per cent correct and when you ask them what it is, they stare at you baffled as though you have asked them for their kidney. Because, *everyone* knows what feminism is. No matter whether you actually believe in that principle or not, hear-say prompts you to pledge yourself to the good cause of feminism. If this is the scene today, then why am I harping about the fact that there are a few people who stand on the other side of the line?

While there are *bona fide* feminists – people who actually devote themselves to understanding before believing, there is a whole list of the non-*bona fide* feminists which comprises non-feminists, people who think they are feminists but do not know what feminism is and feminists for the sake of the word. Non-feminists, as I was talking about earlier, are once again divided into two sub-classes; one being adamantly narrow minded and shockingly orthodox, and the other that do not know what true feminism actually stands for.

The adamantly narrow minded and shockingly orthodox non-feminists are too loyal to their belief that it is the birth right of man to project command over women. And even if not hammered into their mind from the day they were born, they simply revel in exuberance of subduing women. Instead of winning the hearts and being at a position you are respected and looked up at, these men choose to eliminate competition and instil fear to prove dominance. I was recently reading a novel called 'The Forty Rules of Love' by the internationally acclaimed author – Elif Shafak wherein a verse of the Qur'an particularly stood out to me. The al-Nisa. As explained by the author, the verses of the Qur'an are merely words that borrow colour and texture from he who reads it. The al-Nisa is construed to mean that: "*Men*

are maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has granted; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them, surely Allah is High, Great.” However, the same verse in a different translation reads, *“Men are the support of women as God gives more means than others, and because they spend of their wealth (to provide for them). So women who are virtuous are obedient to God and guard the hidden as God has guarded it. As for women you feel are averse, talk to them suavely; then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them) and go to bed with them (when they are willing). If they open out to you, do not seek an excuse for blaming them. Surely God is sublime and great.”*

The stark difference in the translation and interpretation of the Qur’an for the same verse – al-Nisa - is palpable. I agree with Elif Shafak when she equates the Qur’an to a gushing river. According to her, you can only tell there is one river from a distance. Only when you swim in it do you realise that there are four currents. Those who like to swim on the surface are content with the outer meaning of the Qur’an. They take the verses too literally thereby reading al-Nisa to mean that men are superior to women. Because, that is exactly what they want to see. Only when one delves into the depths and goes deeper can one attempt to get a grasp of the Qur’an.

Reflecting upon this, I came to the conclusion that people are so hell-bent on clinging on to beliefs that they think are correct, that they refuse to see, hear or think otherwise. Some people hide behind religion stating that God or Allah is giving them the right of superiority. Amidst this fervent, almost fanatical, devotion, they seem to forget their humanity. How do you explain to such people that you need to plunge into the river and not swim on the surface? How do you explain to such people that man used in ordinary lingo means both man and woman and does not mean God made man superior? How do you explain to such people that their brain cells need to be replaced?

Those who do not know what true feminism means and are thus vehemently non-feminists, are either plagued with unawareness or believe it to be exactly opposite of male dominance i.e. female dominance. Today the world has been swept in a gust of feminism with the #MeToo movement being the most recent. Being at a global scale, it is hard to imagine that it

has not reached every nook and cranny of the world. But certain tier three cities and villages, especially in developing countries like India and Brazil, do face a disconnect from the rest of the world. For people living here, they are simply unaware that a concept of feminism exists. However, one cannot presume that they would be in a patriarchal society. People can get lucky at times. Coming back to people who know of the concept, I believe that they know of an imbalance that exists between men and women in the society. Though they want to bring balance in society, the solutions they advocate do not revolve around getting women to subdue men. And because they believe that that is what feminism stands for, they want no part in it. Thus, they protest against feminism rallies. To turn the people who do not know what true feminism means is relatively easier as compared to the adamantly narrow minded and shockingly orthodox non-feminists. Just educate those who are unaware about feminism and preach the right principles of feminism to those who want to make a change. Already charged with positive energy to right the society, they just need a current to revolutionize the world.

Just like black and white, call and put, husband and wife, non-feminists who do not know what true feminism means are contrasted with people who think they are feminists but do not know what feminism is. A twist to the non-feminist angle is when they support female dominance. All facts and circumstances remaining the same, these feminists staunchly advocate that feminism is associated with women being superior to men. One can co-relate these peculiar feminists to those obnoxiously loud uncles present at every family gathering – with raucous laughter and a know-it-all attitude (not to mention that these uncles are usually presumptuous and therefore almost wrong). To my mind, non-feminists who do not know what true feminism means, are usually men whereas people who think they are feminists but do not know what feminism is, are categorically women. These women are not necessarily motivated by female dominance, they just have a stilted view of feminism. And with this they step into the society and are aggressively feminists. Things where feminism as a concept only would not apply are turned into a hue-and-cry depreciating the movement where, when used right, it can create a positive impact.

People who proclaim themselves to be feminists only for the sake of it are as equally poisonous as people who think they are feminists but do not know what feminism is. For-the-sake-of-it-feminists are people who engage in publicity stunts to build a good image for themselves. While they do not deliberately broadcast anything harmful to the movement, they

do not anything to contribute to the movement either. The laid-back attitude coupled with no interest in actually understanding and standing up for advocating women's right create a void in the atmosphere. This may unnecessarily lead to sexists commenting against people making these statements; thereby giving an opportunity to people who want to shut down the movement. I believe some for-the-sake-of-it-feminists do consciously believe in equality of men and women on a bigger front such as politics and economics. However, their actions don't go hand in hand with their stand. A fact that I have particularly noticed is while these men harp about equal rights, in day to day things they still take women for granted. These little things go unchecked at times because, well, overall you are a feminist, right?

I personally feel that for-the-sake-of-it-feminists belong to the set of 'the-biggest-hypocrites-on-planet-earth'. The ensuing episodes will make you roll your eyes and possibly engage in mild violence too.

Episode 243: Office scenes

The girls to boys ratio at my firm is in favour of the boys. This is usually not a problem unless any event related to sports comes up. Usually, every other month the boys book a turf and play cricket or football amongst themselves. We are never involved in these plans. It is understandable that if they already reach the upper limit they choose to not ask us. What is not okay is the fact that they presume that we don't want to play and that we don't know how to play. Of course, the presumption is based on the 'unwritten rule' that girls cannot play sports. My blood boils hearing this statement. How dare they presume such a fact and generalize girls like that? So, instead of ranting, I approached them and asked them why is it that the girls were not included in these plans. They legitimately said that they don't believe I can play because of my stature and the others were not interested at all. My only resentment was that they didn't give me a chance to decide for myself whether I can play or not. And I would like to mention that the boys we are talking about are not Tendulkars or Pogbas. They themselves are quite average. I don't see how a girl added to their team would make them lose when they were already losing in the first place. Anyway, even after I communicated the same practise has continued. And these are the same guys who have maintained that women ought to get equal rights. I wish it stopped there. It gets worse. We had a counterstrike video game match organised at office. All employees interested were urged to submit their names. I was one of the first ones to sign up for this. Later, it came to my notice that I was the only female employee. I didn't think much of it until the day teams were being decided. My name

was not in any team despite my repeated insistence that I wanted to play. It escalated to the extent that one of the male employees asked me to withdraw my name (indirectly of course). When I didn't and went to the IT team to get the game installed on my laptop, they went out of the way to avoid it, which was the last straw for me. If this is the state of affairs in a well-reputed progressive firm for such a small matter, how do we promote gender equality on a large scale?

Episode 520: Technology

This is another male predominant sector where I have experienced sexism first hand. In the course of CA classes, we had a subject – information technology. The professor who taught us this was brilliant at his job and well-qualified. But every sub-topic he explained started with some sexist statement about girls and how it would be slightly more difficult to understand as compared to boys. He is clearly misogynist to claim that females are dense in the head when it comes to technology. The fact that he just assumed facts without any actual proof ticked me off. What if his daughter was interested in pursuing anything related to technology? Would he hold on to the same belief? Or would he take a different view considering that it is his daughter?

Ranging from non-feminists to for-the-sake-of-it-feminists, none of these people actually guess the flavour of feminism. My pick for closest guess of the right flavour would be the *bona fide* feminists who equate feminism to equality. This according to me is the underlying idea behind the entire movement. Equality here means to give an equal opportunity to both men and women for any particular event. Whatever a girl can do, a boy can; and vice versa. There should be absolutely no bias basis to differentiate the two. I would go a step further and say feminism stands for equality even amongst the same gender. To bridge the gap between two women from vastly different backgrounds so that each can get an opportunity is what feminism stands for. Very simply, feminism to me is that device which does not see race, caste, gender, religion and applies universally to every individual in an unbiased manner. To put it in a fanciful way, it is a colourless device equally applicable to men as women and that is why should be accepted by all. Equal rights is the main ingredient in the dish that people forget. If the main / secret ingredient of the dish is missing, how can you expect the person to savour the taste of it?

Feminism seeks to level the imbalance in the rights available to and within each gender. Looking back at the ‘only-boys-can-drink’ episode, feminism makes sure that if boys drink, girls will drink too. Both abstaining from drinking works too. Likewise, in the ‘periods’ episode, feminism is standing up for abolishing these ‘unwritten rules’ and treating all women the same; with or without their period. This fight requires more tolerance and grit as you are against your fellow soldiers and friends. And as Dumbledore said, “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”¹

True feminists know that when I use enemies to mean ‘men’, we are not man-hating self-righteous women using controversial statements to gain attention. Emma Watson, the renowned UN Women Goodwill Ambassador speaks on behalf of all *bona fide* feminists when she said that, “The more I have spoken about feminism, the more I have realised that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If I know one thing for certain, it is that this has to stop.”

Feminism is uncomplicated and simple. But unfortunately, it has been turned into a foreign concept today. The way this word is tossed in the air, it is overused – ‘*ghisa pita*’ (giving a feel to the word). People decided that being a thorough feminist is too much effort; too much pain; why not tweak it to our advantage? So, the concept of selective feminism was born. As the name suggests, you support feminism when it supports you i.e. media attention or to get away with things; and do away with it when you are the target of controversial topics. Superb idea, isn’t it?

This is just one of the ways feminism is misused. I don’t believe that feminism is ‘misunderstood’ per se. For that to happen, people need to understand it in the first place. And once you understand and know what feminism is, there is no scope for misunderstanding. At all.

The story I put before you is what the future looks like. Some might say it is cynical² and too dark. But it’s a possibility nonetheless:

8:00 am: I made a snowman.

¹ Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone – J. K. Rowling

² Excerpts from a social media message thread

8:10 am: A feminist passed by and asked me why I didn't make a snow woman.

8:15 am: So, I made a snow woman, too.

8:17 am: My feminist neighbour complained about the snow woman's voluptuous chest saying it objectified snow women everywhere.

8:20 am: The homosexual couple living nearby threw a hissy fit and moaned it could have been two snow men instead.

8:22 am: The transgender man..wom...person asked why I didn't just make one snow person with detachable parts.

8:25 am: The vegans at the end of the lane complained about the carrot nose, as veggies are food and not to decorate snow figures with.

8:28 am: I am being called a racist because the snow couple is white.

8:31 am: The Muslim gent across the road demands the snow woman wear a burqa.

8:40 am: The Police arrive saying someone has been offended.

8:42 am: The feminist neighbour complained again that the broomstick of the snow woman needs to be removed because it depicted women in a domestic role.

8:43 am: The council equality officer arrived and threatened me with eviction.

8:45 am: TV news crew from the ABC shows up. I am asked if I know the difference between snowmen and snow-women? I reply, "Snowballs" and am now called a sexist.

9:00 am: I'm on the News as a suspected terrorist, racist, homophobic, sensibility offender, bent on stirring up trouble during difficult weather.

9:10 am: I am asked if I have any accomplices. My children are taken by social services.

9:29 am: Far left protesters offended by everything are marching down the street demanding for me to be beheaded.

Moral: There is no moral to this story.

It's just a view of the world in which we live today, and it is only going to get worse.

To ensure that this is not *my* future, I did a survey and interviewed people from different age groups – both male and female – to understand what the general notion about feminism is.

(A guide to the interview: Hetvi is the interviewer (anonymous) and every other person whose name is used is the interviewee)

Hetvi: Are you a feminist?

Devanshi³: Yes, I am a feminist.

Neelay⁴: Yes, I am proud to be a feminist and I think everyone should be one.

Supriya⁵: Partially. I don't appreciate how loosely that word is used today.

Chintan⁶: Yes. Definitely.

Kinnari⁷: Yes. But it depends on the definition used.

Sandeep⁸: Yes.

Jagruti⁹: Yes. I mean to say I am an independent woman.

Hetvi: What is does feminism mean to you?

Devanshi: Equality of women with men and not women over men

Neelay: Feminism is simple. It is a tool to thrust the scales of justice back to equality. Feminism in that sense, to me, is a misnomer, because of the prejudice associated with the word. Not only that, it has led to senseless entanglement. Feminism has been accused of exaggerating the rights in *favour* of women whereas it is just a mechanism to be equal.

Supriya: I don't like to use the word feminism. But as a concept, it is when you acknowledge that something is amiss, and you do something to make sure that the situation is heard; howsoever small or big the matter is. There needn't be a perfect solution or even get resolved. You just need to step in the right direction.

Chintan: Equal status on all grounds.

Kinnari: I am not sure what the definition is. I wouldn't partake in aggressive feminism which involves revolts and marches and the like. I believe in personal feminism which means to speak up for my rights and to be my own independent person.

Sandeep: To respect woman – all spans of feminism across all ages whether its your mother, wife or daughters.

Jagruti: Not depending on any one. Females should be self-sufficient and be able to do everything by themselves. This extends to men as well.

³ 18 years. College student

⁴ 21 years. CA article.

⁵ 26 years. Qualified CA and working as a senior associate

⁶ 35 years. Father of two sons.

⁷ 47 years. Homemaker and raised two sons

⁸ 51 years. Father of two daughters

⁹ 62 years. Bharatanatyam teacher

Hetvi: Do you think feminism as a concept is misunderstood today?

Devanshi: Definitely yes. Both men and women think that feminism means woman > man. This was clearly seen from the #MeToo movement.

Neelay: Feminism is wretchedly misunderstood today. And in my opinion, a part of it ought to be attributed to the equivocating character of the term; what was intended to underpin the law of equality has come to be known as an over-exploited pretentious nonsense to gain publicity and recognition.

Supriya: I believe that the correct word is 'misused' and not misunderstood. I believe so because females use it to get away with a lot of things.

Chintan: I believe that feminism is vastly accepted in all strata of the society. In India, though, I feel that tier 1 cities have a higher capacity for feminism as compared to the villages. Today, people understand what feminism is. Only in the #MeToo trend, it was an I said she said situation. People didn't come out in the past because society was not that accepting, but I still feel that views are misplaced. Rather than feminism, #MeToo was more character oriented. But as a holistic view, feminism is not misunderstood.

Kinnari: Sometimes yes, I feel it is misunderstood. In the modern world are well acquainted with feminism. I think it was misused during the #MeToo movement. Why did people wake up now? And you need to see both sides of the story. Other than genuine things such as maternity leave, everything seems to be irrational.

Sandeep: I don't think it is misunderstood. Females are career oriented today. A chance maybe they did not have before and were taken for granted. Feminism has played its role and is currently ruling India.

Jagruti: It is misuse not misunderstood. Feminist women may take their independence too far. For example, leave everything to the care of servants.

Hetvi: If you had kids, what is the most simplistic way in which you would explain feminism?

Neelay: I believe that nurturing the spirit of tolerance and equality is feminism. Or better still, the said done right shall not need us to have a separate feminist belief.

Supriya: It means gender equality wherein equal opportunities for both girls and boys without any bifurcation in any aspect of life so that both can live in peace.

Chintan: What you (5 years old son) can do, Nysha (4 years old niece) can do.

Sandeep: Respect achievements of women.

Jagruti: I tell my students it means independence where nobody can take you for granted.

Hetvi: What is your substitute for the word feminism?

Devanshi: Since 'feminism' is too ghisa pita, it should be female equality.

Neelay: *Masculinism*. The root is to abandon any dominance or subjugation of one sex to the other, that again brings me to, equity.

Chintan: Empowerment. But it could be misconstrued to support female status not equal status. But I don't see the need for a different word.

Jagruti: Independence and education.

Hetvi: Thank you for being such wonderful guests.

To sum up the opinions of various persons; majority was pro feminism as a concept but not as a definition. Everyone had their own element to it. But this was a representative sample of seven from a population of trillions. If each added a different spice to the dish, it would be more complicated than '*bhel*' in the literal sense. The glimpse of the bleak future that I showed you guys does not seem to pose an immediate threat according to me. Undoubtedly, there is a good probability of the future working out in that manner with the way our world is already progressing. But we have the odds in our favour. We are in the now and have all the power to make sure that society does not tilt in that direction.

Feminism is like a see-saw. Man on one side, woman on the other. If the man is heavier, the see saw tilts in his direction and vice versa. The trick to prevent this is to balance at the fulcrum – a standstill. Well weight-wise it would be impossible to give a fool proof suggestion. The man may weight more. The woman may diet. And all other hundred and eighty-six permutations and combinations. My ground-breaking solution is to share the weight. Simple, right?

The weight borne by man and woman signify the 'choice' they have. Woman whose feet don't touch the ground, are deprived of the choices that are weighed in man's favour. To balance the squatting man and the flying woman, you pass this weight as necessary. In this situation, man has to uplift the woman by helping her to get the choice she was always entitled to. Everyone knows how a see-saw works. It is not biased towards any side. Thus, man and woman have an equal power and responsibility and capability for '*jugaad*' to balance the see-saw.

Metaphorically speaking, the design of the see-saw has greatly evolved from the past. Better workmanship and quality of wood is now creating wonderful designs. The progress report showing an A+. Gone are the days of the 19th century where women were not allowed to vote. They were regarded as meek and domestic creatures capable only of taking care of people. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland at least, politicians had thoroughly deliberated on the subject of women's suffrage and decided that they never should be allowed to vote because¹⁰:

1. Women's tiny brains had no capacity for logical thought. Their emotional nature made them incapable of understanding politics.
2. If women were to get involved in politics, they would be too busy to marry and have children, and the entire human race would die out, which would be very bad indeed.
3. If women got involved in politics, they would be on an equal footing with men, thus creating the appalling condition of equality of the sexes and putting an end to all need for male chivalry and gentlemanly behaviour, which would be even worse.
4. All government ultimately rested on brute force. Since the gentle nature of women made them incapable of that, they were simply not suited for politics.

Well, it would be an understatement to say that there is definitely progress today. Women have been involved in politics and the human race is, lo behold, still alive. And I think female assassins are scarier than mercenaries.

Before I sign off, my penultimate plea to the parents of the Indian society is that equality starts at home. A girl is taught how to cook, how to clean and everything else involved in the running of a household. Why? Because she is going to get married and will go to her husband's house where she is going to be responsible for all this. A boy is taught none of these basic survival skills. Why? Because he is going to get married and his wife will do all this for him. Sounds like feminism done absolutely done right, doesn't it?

There are so many things wrong with the way of life in current households. Teach your girls all of these activities, not because she is handed over responsibility and it's her wifely duty; but because it is a part of the Basic Survival Toolkit. She should be taught these things with the intent to make her independent and self-sufficient. Then give her the choice of whether

¹⁰Reference drawn from Storm and Silence by Rob Their

she wants to accept the same or not instead of thrusting it upon her and taking away her right of saying 'No!'. And the boys, they do not need the Basic Survival Toolkit at all because it is their birth right to order their wives to do everything while they trot off to work. I am sorry but that sentiment does not work today. The Basic Survival Toolkit is as much a necessity for boys as it is for girls. Teach your boys independence and how to stand on their own two feet.

As I said, feminism or equality or whatever it is you associate yourself with, starts at home. You don't need to conduct rallies. You don't need interviews in the newspapers as headliners. You don't need to be known in the society. You don't need opportunities to proclaim yourself as a feminist. All you need, is the belief that everyone is equal, so everyone has a choice. Knowing that something is not quite right and taking that step forward to right it is all that is required. Nobody cares whether you are a feminist or not as long as you pledge yourself to equality; except for Emma Watson because for her:

“If you stand for equality, then you're a feminist. Sorry to tell you.”

And I say the same to you.

Bibliography

Most of the places from where excerpts have been used, a footnote reference has been given.

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- Excerpts from a social media message thread
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