



# **FEMINISM, A MISUNDERSTOOD CONCEPT TODAY**

Feminism (noun): the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes.

Feminism (political ideology): A range of political, movements and ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal.

Synonyms: the women's movement, women's liberation et al.

Above are the meanings of the word in discussion today - not only in this essay, but in your daily life – from the top two platforms that a person logs onto to get a basic background information about something – Google and Wikipedia.

Taking that into account, that is the general idea that people have formed or understood about this sensitive word, 'feminism'. The word, or 'movement', has become something that everyone should know about, not just to be politically aware and know whether to identify oneself as a feminist or (sadly) not, but to be 'cool' and 'fit in'. So, what does that result in? Feminism becoming the most searched word of 2017.

And when you scan through the Google page results on searching for the word on the search engine, 'movement', 'liberation', 'politics' and other such heavy words immediately pop up. Don't such words immediately suggest a revolt, an uprising, something aggressive too perhaps?

That's probably where one first falters in understanding feminism, in thinking that it is an angry, offensive insurgence, rather than something that should just exist, like nature, and be accepted righteously, mutually, quickly.

'Feminist' is a person who believes in feminism, who advocates it. It is pretty close to the word 'feminine'. People suggest replacing it with words such as 'egalitarianism' or 'humanism'. However, the word 'mankind' also has the word 'man' in it. That does not mean that mankind means only the male homo sapiens, surely? Feminism is for one and all, then why is it that people are very presumptuous in assuming all women are feminists, but they themselves do not like to associate with that word, feel scared even, especially of radical feminism?

Let me ask you one simple question first: do you identify yourself as a feminist?

Most people will not give a straight 'yes' as an answer, it's almost always conditional. Responses I got to hear from my peers when asked this question are "Not like one of those internet feminists", or "I don't hate men". That's the whole point – no matter how many big words countless search engines throw on you as the definition of feminism, it is in fact not that complicated a concept. It can be summarised in one word, viz 'equality'. And when you are

asked whether you identify yourself as a feminist, sure, you might be all for equality, but why are you afraid to accept it? Would you call yourself a feminist, without any further explanations or conditions attached?

That gap is where the misunderstandings lie, which make people feel a need to justify their stance, when it should not have been required in the first place.

*'A feminist is anyone who recognises the equality and full humanity of women and men.'* – Gloria Steinem

To break down these misconceptions, let's go back to the time feminism first came into picture. When do you think that was? The start of the #MeToo movement back in 2006, or maybe in 2002 when the internet was just getting popular?

Wrong. The occurrence of the word 'feminism' in books peaked in 1996 and has actually been in decline ever since. (1) The term dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and started with a fight for the most basic right, i.e. the right to vote, in the first wave of feminism. While today this right is almost taken for granted, our female ancestors had to work hard for us to call this a basic right.

The second wave of feminism came around in the 1960s, focussing on equality, at workplace and at home. It encouraged women to understand how their personal life reflected sexist power structures. The third wave began in the 1990s, trying to cover up what the second wave missed out on, and figuring out what 'feminine' is. It was back then when women started fighting for an equal pay grade as the men. This current phase can be referred to as the fourth wave of feminism, where the internet makes it a much larger and ground-breaking movement. Everyone is now a part of it, is aware of it, has opinions on it. This issue cannot be deferred any longer. (2)

Why is it that a movement that started over 200 years ago is still finding it a struggle to look for complete success? One can always point out that such things take time, need to tackle one issue at once. Then why is it that the problems that were trying to be addressed in the second wave are still being fought for in the fourth?

This is all because over the years, we have learnt how to complicate this simple idea of equality even further. We pile up one opinion on top of the other, but later leaving it there to rot till

someone notices it again, tries to clean, but falls short. That is all feminism is really about, equality. Equity for all the sexes, male, female or trans.

Now let's tackle down what feminism is not.

❖ **Misconception: All feminists are angry**

Feminists truly scare people. Try asking a woman to tell a man that she's a radical feminist. The man will make as many excuses as he can to get as far away from there as he can, and think that he avoided an argument, a conflict. It was considered such an issue, that female hysteria was once considered a common medical diagnosis for women. And the doctors would prescribe intercourse to any woman who is feeling short of breath, irritable, has a loss of appetite for food or sex or felt nervous. Basically, if any woman reacts in a way that could lead her to not wanting to engage in intercourse, she was called sick, prescribed intercourse, and still isolated as unwell. (3)

So yes, people are angry. People are angry about the history of sexism, about the way things have been carried out for so long, and how much longer it is taking for people to realise what an urgent matter to attend this is, how dented patriarchy is. A woman has every right to be angry. If you're not angry, you're not paying attention. However, that does not mean that a feminist is angry at you, and specifically you. All they want is understanding, some help. One knows that they are not supposed to misdirect their anger, and no one is going to pounce at you. Well... unless you give them a reason to.

*'I have chosen to be no longer apologetic for my femininity. And I want to be respected in all my femaleness.'* – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

---

1 As per Google Ngram Viewer

2 <http://www.ohiohumanities.org/betty-friedan-the-three-waves-of-feminism/>

3 <http://victorian-era.org/female-hysteria-during-victorian-era.html>

---

### ❖ **Misconception: Only females can be feminists**

When I discussed this essay with my peers, the male ones said that they will have to ask their female friends for inputs to choose the same topic as mine. On asking them on why so, they answered it like it was obvious, that their female friends can be feminists, and they, being men, cannot.

That is one basic thing people do not recognise. Feminism means acknowledging that power struggles associated with patriarchy fall somewhere between unfair and unbearable for most people. This feminist belief can be held by man, woman or trans. Of course, those who have been a victim to the unfortunate circumstances history and tradition have thrown upon them connect with this ideology at a more personal level than others. Those are the ones with the experiences and stories, like a pride march is primarily for the ones on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. But that does not mean their allies do not march with them, give them support wherever required. In the same way, a woman does not expect a man to know what it is like to be a victim of sexism in their daily life. That does not mean that a man cannot be a feminist. The only criteria to join the club is to understand that all are equal and deserve to be treated equally. Feminism does not discriminate; its main objective is to remove that discrimination. (1)

In fact, women should not have the need to bring the men on the same page as us, they should be outraged already. Not because someone is their wife, their daughter, their mother, but because they are people like you. They themselves should realise how important it is to be an ally of the woman. (2)

*'I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.'* – Audre Lorde.

### ❖ **Misconception: Feminists hate men**

Misandry is a dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men. We regret the microaggressions men face. We think about how it is not acknowledged enough that men are victims to the misandrists.

---

1 <https://medium.com/thrive-global/what-is-the-root-cause-of-misandry-17c4fe193959>

2 <https://medium.com/s/jessica-valenti/dear-men-feminism-needs-you-833f77dcd95>

However, this open-hatred of men comes from ignorance and misinterpretation of what feminism is all about. A sexual assault survivor might lean towards misandry, or even misogyny.

Misogyny? Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men.

So yes, maybe a sexually assaulted person might lean towards this strong thought of hating all the opposite sex. Doesn't this seem like more of a coping mechanism to you, that both the genders perform?

Sure, some women might hate men, all due to times they have been victims to different men of different proximities around them. They have grown tired of trusting people. A portion, though, does not represent the whole, even if that portion is loud. Firstly, not all feminists are women, as already discovered before, and secondly, not all the women who are feminists are man-hating misandrists, hardly any of them are.

'Why do feminists hate men' – why does a movement for women become so misunderstood to the point that it is still about men?

*'The idea of the man-hating feminist is one of the most dangerous myths about feminism. What feminists actually hate are the systems of oppression which allow inequality to flourish. In fact, men are arguably oppressed by these same systems, too. The idea that men are strong and women are weak, for example, allows no wriggle room for either gender. It's a rigid box that traps both and doesn't allow for factors such as race, class, sexuality, sexual identity and levels of ability. It's also a profoundly stupid thing to say, as though humans are fixed into one category and women and men must always be oppositional. We're so much more complex than that.'* – Natalie Kon-Yu

❖ **Misconception: Feminism is putting down men**

At least when you nodded your head on reading the above misconception, you and I both agreed on one thing: the status of the man is currently higher than the others, higher than it should be. As also established in the previous misconception, that this is not accusing any man of for the entire history of sexism. That is simply pointing out that fact. One man cannot be held responsible for the entire history of sexism. And that is common knowledge.

What one is trying to do is bring the woman up. Feminism is not about hurting the man and blaming him for all one's problems. Feminism tries to do something about the issue, to level up the women, to make sure there is no notion of levels or status itself in the future.

But why do people believe such a thing is true when it's not? (1) A study showed that the smallest change in the way you describe someone can completely alter the way you perceive them. This rumour of feminism being an attack on men has been taking rounds for way too many years now. When women spoke up about wanting to have their basic rights, the early ages, which certainly did not consider women capable of having their basic rights, labelled women as anti-family, anti-God and anti-men radical hedonist. That labelling has continued to today, because a group with a lot of power (men) tend to do whatever they can to maintain that power.

The argument that feminism believes 'all men are evil' is comfortably recited by anti-feminists as a method of debunking feminism.

*'The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.'* – Virginia Woolf

#### ❖ **Misconception: Feminists aren't ready to address men's issues**

Well, this one might not be entirely untrue, but justified.

The spotlight has been shining over the men for a long, long time.

And now women are finally gaining some momentum, some attention. Of course, men have plenty issues too, and no one is denying that. There are a lot of gender-based men's issues to address. But the world has been focussed on the men and their problems for a while now. Women are now rightfully scared that if everyone stops and even slightly shifts the focus back to the men, the position of women will never better. Women need all the support they can get right now, and the way to try to attain equality is not screaming, "But what about the men and how many problems they face?"

And while we are acknowledging the fact that men have issues too, let's sort out what classify as issues men have to face,

- Societal expectations of masculinity
- Societal expectations to provide for women

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/12/reasons-people-believe-feminism-hates-men/>

- Men who are raped are more likely to be silent and be dismissed or outright laughed at
- No long term reversible male birth control
- Unfair treatment in child custody battle
- Alimony
- No support for male victims of domestic abuse
- Sports as a lens of culture and masculinity

However, the following certainly do not qualify as issues that men should complain about:

- The friend-zone
- Radical feminists
- Having to make place for more people on the same level as them
- Not getting attention, or the amount of attention that they are accustomed to (1)

Of course, there are real issues, and things that our society needs to work on to correct. But feminists are afraid of the topic of conversation moving away. Feminists would like to see pro-feminist men tackle men's issues in a way that doesn't blame women, feminism, and their problems. And of course, these are also issues that feminists are willing to tackle, as there are two sides to every coin, and if an assumption of the man being expected to have a stone cold heart, the woman is also on the other side considered to be over-emotional and hysterical due to their hormones. These stereotypes cannot exist in a vacuum, and fighting one will also help fight the other. (2)

*'One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.'* – Joan of Arc

---

1 [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/shenomics/5-uninformed-ideas-that-make-feminism-a-bad-word-in-india\\_a\\_21628411/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/shenomics/5-uninformed-ideas-that-make-feminism-a-bad-word-in-india_a_21628411/)

2 <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/12/reasons-people-believe-feminism-hates-men/>



### ❖ **Misconception: Types of feminism**

Before seeing why it is a misconception, let's look at the types of feminism:

- **Liberal feminism:** This regards human beings as rational, autonomous, and self-interested individuals. This tradition strongly values liberty. This variety of feminism that works with the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure.
- **Radical feminism:** Radical feminism opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be sceptical of political action within the current system and instead tend to focus on culture change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchical structures. (1)
- **Marxist and Socialist Feminism:** Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus, they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist feminism is the result of Marxism meeting radical feminism. (2)
- **Cultural Feminism:** The view that there is a "female nature" or "female essence" or related attempts to revalidate attributes ascribed to femaleness. It is also used to describe theories that commend innate differences between women and men.
- **Black feminism:** Black feminism believes that racism and gender discrimination are two sides of the same coin. The liberation and freedom from oppression of black women would ensure equality for everyone, according to Black Feminists, who refer to themselves as 'Womanists'.
- **Eco-feminism:** This type of feminism is more spiritual in nature, believing that the patriarchal society will exploit the environment without thinking about what the long-term consequences of such actions might be.
- **Separatist Feminism:** This is an extreme form of feminism, that is against heterosexual relationships itself. This believes that no man can contribute positively to the feminist movement, and hence it is better to cut down all ties with men.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-radical-feminism-3528997>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism\\_kinds.htm](https://www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism_kinds.htm)

- **I-Feminism:** I-feminism is a newer branch of feminism which focuses on the individuality of women, as well as their individual choices. This type of feminism supports every choice of a woman.

Now to me, these types of feminism are completely redundant. This complicates the concept more than it should be. To be a feminist simply means to believe that everyone should be treated equally, regardless of sex. For such a simple concept, feminism is dramatically misunderstood.

But what does equality even mean?

It means equality within the system of gender – equal respect for man and woman. It is not ‘sameness’. Men and women don’t have to be the ‘same’ in physicality to have the right to equality. If you believe in equality for all, are you able to take a brave stand for I, in a way that feels right to you, in your own life and in your own sphere of influence?

*‘I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that distinguish me from a doormat.’ – Rebecca West*

❖ **Misconception: Some inequalities are due to the different anatomies of the sexes**

Men and women have different body types. Men have different hormones such as testosterone in a dominating amount, while women have oestrogen. This might alter the way they react to certain things, and of course there is menstruation and pregnancy, which may give women mood swings and physical pain at times.

The trouble is, people use this to assume unproven assumptions about biological determinism. It seems very safe to say that women will not be interested in technology or running a business because of how they are biologically and mentally.

However, these are a result of the stereotypes that have been bombarding women since they joined school. Even girl toddlers are given pink glittery t-shirts reading ‘princess’, and boy toddlers get blue ‘astronaut’ t-shirts.

In fact, as per a study, college-bound women are not less likely to enter specific fields because more math or science is required, but rather because of the gender discrimination they are likely to encounter in those fields. The results of the study suggest that, by far, the most predictive attribute of whether a female chose a college major was the degree of discrimination perceived in the field. This finding was consistent across all of the researchers' analyses, even when they matched males and females on prior backgrounds, achievement and interests, and regardless of which other attributes of college majors were included in the statistical models. (1)

It might be a huge cliché saying this, much like the rest of this essay, but it is required: a person should be hired into a job looking at just her C.V. and experience. Questions like, “Considering you are a woman, how do you plan on travelling to work when your home is so far away?”, or always having the doubt that you’re not able to achieve your full potential due to the restrictions cast on you as a woman as something that should not be in practice anymore, should not have ever been, but yet is a commonly known condition. And people do not even identify it as an issue.

*‘Feminism isn’t about making women strong. Women are already strong. It’s about changing the way the world perceives that strength’ – G.D. Anderson*

❖ **Misconception: We have attained equality**

This seems like an absurd point to address after a long rant on the need for feminism, but let’s tackle this too.

A lot of people may feel like the fuss is about nothing. Yes, women were oppressed and devoid of their rights, but that was ages ago. They have all the same rights as the man does and there no more is anything to complain about.

Now, of course, there have been a lot of improvements that the women have been fighting for and finally attained. That does not mean we’re done here.

Some people do not realise this because of the circle they are in. Everyone around them might be ‘woke’ or simply sensible and feel like tare the issues are dealt with. These are the people who do not realise if they say or do something sexist, irrespective of degree since that is not something that matters here, and feel offended when someone points it out to them.

---

1 <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/01/180123102002.htm>

This is not even something that is entirely their fault, or something they should be fully blamed for. That is all they've known and how they've been brought up. What should be done is make them understand why and how it is wrong, and them making an effort to correct it, instead of getting defensive or saying that people are trying to blame people for absolutely no reason.

*'Male domination is so rooted in our collective unconscious that we no longer even see it.'* — Pierre Bourdieu

❖ **Misconception: All women are feminists**

Although this misconception is already partly shunned in previous points, let's completely break it down.

If Gen X women were raised to believe they *could* "have it all," millennial women were the first generation to reach for it on a broad scale. Today, more women attend and graduate from college than men, and being a working woman is the norm. In new poll from Refinery29 and CBS News, 54% of young women said they do not identify as 'feminist.' Overall, younger women are still more likely to identify themselves as a feminist than an older woman. This is because while they believe in some aspects and causes that feminists fight for, they do not wish to associate themselves with some other matters of discussion, neither with the heat and emotional tension that follows.

Other women who are not feminists might not be one for a reason other than that they do not wish to associate themselves as angry feminists, being that they feel there is no need for such as movement, which may be prominent amongst the upper working middle class woman. They think modern feminists are creating a fuss about nothing. They think that acknowledging that men and women have different strengths and weaknesses is not sexist, and that is all that is being done.

A small portion of women also do not relate to the feminist movement. This may be because they are from the privileged class and are not aware of the problems other women face in their day-to-day life, or decide to go blind to it. This may also be because they feel that they have other issues to deal with or they do not fit into the category. Such as a dark-skinned woman may feel that she has racism as an issue impacting her much more than feminism and would like to address that instead, or a trans person may

feel that this movement is not for people who are not straight and it is not their platform to voice their opinions. (1)

*'Sometimes I think the only real division into two is between people who divide everything into two and those who don't.'* — Gloria Steinem

#### ❖ **Misconception: #MeToo is for Feminism**

The #MeToo movement was started by Tarana Burke in 2006 with the object to help survivors of sexual violence come out of the aura they had suffered. The purpose of the movement was to create a community and built in groups of people who automatically get you, who believe you, you want to hear from you. It was to create sympathy. That's the wild fire of it. In her words itself, it has shifted from what it is. It has become a gender war.

The recent wave of #MeToo started worldwide with Harry Weinstein's sex scandal, and arrived at India shortly later with famous internet bloggers being accused of sexual harassment, and actress Tanushree Dutta accusing actor Nana Patekar. Now, none of this is news to you, it has been a hot topic for the past two years, and your neighbour kid will know its details well too.

And of course we should be proud for the ones who have raised their hand and spoken up under the hashtag. The world is listening to them and protecting them. A majority of the people speaking up might even be women. That, though, does not equate #MeToo to feminism. #MeToo has become a scary thing people do not want to associate themselves with anymore, and most feel that this movement has started in support of the internet feminism phase.

It might seem strange to assert that #MeToo can be spoken of as a single ideology at all – that this cultural moment, which has exposed such a broad array of bad behaviour across so many industries and disciplines, could ever be coherent enough to have an agenda. But #MeToo, as a social movement and as a personal gesture, makes certain assumptions that aren't compatible with the intellectual habits of most mainstream feminisms that have preceded it. By saying "me too", an individual woman makes herself a part of a broader group, and chooses to stand with others who have been harassed, assaulted or raped. This solidarity is powerful. (2)

---

1 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/midterm-election-women-dont-identify-as-feminists>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/11/how-metoo-revealed-the-central-rift-within-feminism-social-individualist>

But the group formed does not, and should not, contain of only women.

It is for men, women and trans alike to speak up about their past traumas and seek help to deal with it. It is not about women's rights, even though that's what is helping to achieve alongside. #MeToo is an independent movement altogether.

*'I raise up my voice – not so I can shout, but so those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.'* – Malala Yousafzai

To close my ranting session, let's look at it all in a nutshell.

India's diversity explains a wide range of cultural paradoxes: the worship of goddesses and the barring of women from temples; reverence for Indira but disdain for working women; a woman's virtue valued above all else amidst a rampant rape culture. These contradictions exist not just in the same nation, but at times within the same person, regardless of education, status or even gender. And while there are many gendered inequities that persist, there are also many women who thrive in every facet of their life despite them. As there is no single "Indian", there is no single brush with which to paint the situation or status of women. That's what tries complicating feminism in India.

I don't think anyone, with any degree of intellectual honesty, can say women hold equal status to men in India. And yet, the need for feminism is strongly contested by men and women alike. We live in a world where a group of people clearly have more privilege than another (men) and get offended or even shocked when someone tries to snatch this privilege away from them. Take for example an only child who is spoiled with a nursery full of toys, and when that child joins a school starts crying about the fact that they must share their toys with other children as well. Or like an old man having a community pool all to himself, when that pool opens up to they public, they get angry about their right to swim in the pool all by himself.

And what we're seeing politically right now is a bit of anger from both sides. On one side, we see people who are angry about "those people" being let into "our" pool. They're angry about sharing their toys with the other kids in the classroom. They're angry about being labelled as sexists just because they have certain sexist viewpoints. They want to do something about something, but do not want to move out of anyone's way. People have to make way for them, and things are still supposed to fall into place. (1)

---

1 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-boeskool/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege\\_b\\_9460662.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-boeskool/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege_b_9460662.html)

Let's start calling ourselves feminists without any prejudice, and live up to that name, that community. Let's educate ourselves with what it actually means and help others around us be aware of the same too. Let's unlearn patriarchy together, you and me.

There might be bad men, for sure. But that does not mean all men are bad. We need the help of the good men to get rid of the bad ones. Let's not encourage your sons to grow up in fear and thinking they are bad, or let your daughters grow resenting men. Gender bias and sexism go both ways and don't be surprised if a few men's right activists demand equality in the name of feminism. (1)

She is a warrior in herself, who wants to stand up by herself, hold her ground and fight her battles for herself, but also be sure of the cheers she can hear in the background.

Feminism, for me, is not wishing that women have the same rights as men. Feminism is having basic human rights and being able to live life freely and safely, without being judged. Forcing the idea of pseudo-feminism will not bring freedom from patriarchy.

What is feminism to you?

*'When you're accustomed to privilege, equality can feel like oppression.'* – Anonymous.

---

1 <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/lifestyle/misinterpretation-feminism>

---

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- <http://victorian-era.org/female-hysteria-during-victorian-era.html>
- Google Ngram Viewer
- <http://www.ohiohumanities.org/betty-friedan-the-three-waves-of-feminism/>
- <https://medium.com/thrive-global/what-is-the-root-cause-of-misandry-17c4fe193959>
- <https://medium.com/s/jessica-valenti/dear-men-feminism-needs-you-833f77dcdf95>
- <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/12/reasons-people-believe-feminism-hates-men/>
- [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/shenomics/5-uninformed-ideas-that-make-feminism-a-bad-word-in-india\\_a\\_21628411/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/shenomics/5-uninformed-ideas-that-make-feminism-a-bad-word-in-india_a_21628411/)
- <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/12/reasons-people-believe-feminism-ates-men/>
- <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-radical-feminism-3528997>
- [https://www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism\\_kinds.htm](https://www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism_kinds.htm)
- <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/01/180123102002.htm>
- <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/midterm-election-women-dont-identify-as-feminists>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/11/how-metoo-revealed-the-central-rift-within-feminism-social-individualist>
- <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/lifestyle/misinterpretation-feminism>