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“FEMINISM: A MISUNDERSTOOD CONCEPT TODAY”

Abstract

The global cosmetic products market was valued at around USD 532 billion in 2017 and is expected to reach approximately USD 863 billion in 2024.¹ Recently, the make-up industry was bashed and bludgeoned exposing it to be a mere sham inculcating generations worth of self-loathing and self-consciousness in young women who are nonchalantly expected to appear in a certain manner in public in order to look presentable. However, historical records show that ancient Egyptian women felt empowered through the usage of cosmetic products of their time and age, which also dictated their status in the society. Feminism disguises itself in a coherent and lucid definition but has spread its ambit to cover numerous issues which emerge as the society progresses forward. From the movements to attain political suffrage to the movements propagating nudism, the definition of feminism has spread its wings and sprung across generations to expand its meaning in furtherance of fulfilling the inner awakenings of women now and then. However, there are other certain misunderstood concepts around feminism today which have callously drawn away attention from the paramount necessities of the movement as a whole. Through the following essay the author has undertaken to define and draw out the ambit of feminism directing to its roots and causes, and its journey over generations.

¹ <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/06/22/1528369/0/en/Global-Cosmetic-Products-Market-Will-Reach-USD-863-Billion-by-2024-Zion-Market-Research.html> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

Introduction

“To those accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”² The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines feminism as ‘*the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes, an organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests.*’³ Etymologically, a man by the name of Eugenie Potonie-Pierre is said to have coined the term feminism in 1896, whilst writing about the indelible link between women's status and social progress.⁴ It was during the 1890s that ‘feminism’ in the sense of women-led activism for equality became a common term, migrating from France and entering the English language as early as October 1894 in a London newspaper article.⁵ The theory of feminism itself emerged as early as 1794 in publications such as ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’ by Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘*The Changing Woman*’, ‘*Ain't I a Woman*’, ‘*Speech after Arrest for Illegal Voting*’, etc.⁶ The moot question then arises is that did feminism not exist as a concept before it was defined and curated through words?

The History Of Feminism: Balance Of Inconvenience- Shift From Egalitarian To Patriarchal Societies

Our prehistoric forebears are often portrayed as spear-wielding savages, but the earliest human societies are likely to have been founded on enlightened egalitarian principles, according to scientists. A study has shown that in contemporary hunter-gatherer tribes, men and women tended to have equal influence on where their group lives and who they live with. The findings challenge the idea that sexual equality is a recent invention, suggesting that it has been the norm for humans for most of our evolutionary history. The authors argue that sexual equality may

² Anonymous.

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

⁴ In Rosalie Schoenflies et al., eds., *Der Internationale Kongress fur Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen*: Berlin, 19-26 September 1896 (Berlin: Walther, 1897), 40.

⁵ Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes," *Signs* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 4-28; reprinted in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁶ Moira Ferguson, ed., *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Simon Shephard, ed., *The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985).

have proved an evolutionary advantage for early human societies, as it would have fostered wider-ranging social networks and closer cooperation between unrelated individuals. The study suggests that it was only with the dawn of agriculture, when people were able to accumulate resources for the first time, that an imbalance emerged. It was more beneficial for men to start accumulating resources and more favourable to form alliances with male kin.⁷ Thus, the first shift from an egalitarian to a patriarchal society emerged when homo-sapiens shifted their nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a settled agricultural life.

Fight for Equality

However, many female rulers yet managed to subsist through history. The first female ruler in ancient Egyptian history, Merneith, lived during the reign of the First Dynasty, around 2970 BC.⁸ In the literature of the early Vedic period, there are several mentions of female scholars like Lopamudra, Maitreyi and Gargi. Among the educated women of the era, Gargi Vachaknavi is believed to be a pioneer. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, she has been credited for having drawn forth from philosophers some of the most profound questions of Vedanta – the nature of the Soul (*Brahman*) and the origins of the universe – during a public debate with Vedic philosopher Yajnavalkya. Queen Didda, who had a leg disability, ruled Kashmir with an iron hand for more than four decades during the 10th century. Her tremendous political survival skills, her ability to rule and her achievement of stability in the fractious kingdom she had inherited is why she is sometimes called the Catherine of Kashmir, referring to the ruthless Catherine the Great (the longest ruling female leader of Russia). When taunted by Mughal commander Wajir Khan about the weakness of women in the battlefield, Bibi Dalair Kaur is believed to have replied fiercely with the following words: “We are the hunters, not the hunted. Come forward and find out for yourself!” At a time when people hardly acknowledged the grievances of women in India, Savitribai Phule, along with her husband Jyotirao Phule, fought injustices against women. In those days, widows used to shave their heads, wear a simple white sari and live a life of austerity. It was Savitribai who decided to stand up against this practice

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/may/14/early-men-women-equal-scientists> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

⁸ <https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/feminism-and-battle-women-s-rights-ancient-egypt-005895> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

and organized a strike against the barbers in order to persuade them to stop shaving the heads of the widows, most of whom were still children. She also noticed the plight of sexually exploited women who, after becoming pregnant, either committed suicide or killed the newborn due to fear of banishment by society. To cater to such women, she opened a care centre (called Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha or Infanticide Prohibition House) for pregnant rape victims and helped deliver their children. She also founded the first school for women at Bhide Wada in Pune in 1848. Rabindranath Tagore's sister, Swarnakumari Devi, was a committed social worker and started an initiative, Sakhi Samiti, in 1896 to help widows, orphan girls and poverty stricken women of Bengal. She also played an active role in the Indian nationalist movement. The era also saw the rise of many women's organizations like the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Women within the national movement had begun insisting on greater political and economic participation. These pioneering organizations included the Bharat Stri Mandal in Calcutta, formed in 1910 by Sarala Devi, and the Women's India Association founded in 1917 by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Malati Patwardhan, Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs. Dadabhoy, and Mrs Ambujammal. Annie Besant also led the Home Rule League and was elected President of the Calcutta Congress session in 1917. The year 1917 was also significant as Sarojini Naidu led a delegation of women to meet the Montagu-Chelmsford Committee to demand a series of reforms in the condition of Indian women. In 1925, Sarojini Naidu was elected President of Indian National Congress, the first Indian woman to hold that post.⁹

Political Suffrage

The campaign for women's suffrage began in earnest in the decades before the Civil War. During the 1820s and 30s, most states had extended the franchise to all white men, regardless of how much money or property they had. At the same time, all sorts of reform groups were proliferating across the United States—temperance leagues, religious movements, moral-reform societies, anti-slavery organizations—and in many of these, women played a prominent role. Meanwhile, many American women were beginning to chafe against what historians have called the “Cult of True Womanhood”: that is, the idea that the only “true” woman was a pious,

⁹ Singh, S. & Singh, P. (2011). “Shobha De: Deconstructed for Maverick Feminism.” In Contemporary Indian Women Novelists in English, Ed. Indu Swami, Sarup: Delhi.

submissive wife and mother concerned exclusively with home and family. Put together, all of these contributed to a new way of thinking about what it meant to be a woman and a citizen of the United States.¹⁰

Anti-Slavery Movement

Anti-slavery and temperance movements sowed the first seeds of feminism in the mid-1800s. In 1840, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott were denied seats at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London due to their gender. Rallying other socially minded people together to discuss the status of women, Stanton and Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. The Declaration of Sentiments, penned by Stanton, outlined the need for equality among men and women, including voting rights. From there, the suffrage movement progressed, with women including Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth leading the way.¹¹

Women's Liberation Movement

After World War II, a growing number of women pursued higher education and entered the workforce, but they weren't scampering to the tops of career ladders or bursting through glass ceilings. The Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s therefore emerged from women's desires to revolutionize the fundamental aspects of female life at that time: domesticity, employment, education and sexuality.

National Organization for Women (NOW)

In 1966, Betty Friedan and other prominent feminists formed the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW became the umbrella organization for many feminist causes, uniting older, college-educated, predominantly white women. These second-wave feminists, such as Ms. magazine founder Gloria Steinem, pushed for access to the pill, abortion, equal employment opportunity, reduction of violence against women and more. Two years later, in 1968, the first national feminist conference took place in Chicago.¹²

¹⁰ Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981).

¹¹ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983).

¹² Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981).

Black Feminism

The Women's Liberation Movement was criticized by some feminists, both black and white, for its exclusion of nonwhite, working class women. Although the omission wasn't intentional, this fracture spurred the rise of black feminism. Since Women's Liberation platforms focused solely on gender without the context of race and class, they weren't entirely relevant to all black women. Womanism is one offshoot of black feminism that also developed in the 1970s, coined by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker. In the gap between white feminism and black feminism, womanism sought to provide a theoretical bridge by examining society as a universal whole rather than the problems and issues unique to its separate parts.¹³

Anti-Porn Feminism

Anti-porn feminism arose in the late 1970s, pioneered by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. At that time, pornography had become more readily accessible, and to some feminists, the overtly sexual portrayal of women violated their civil rights and promoted sexual violence. Anti-porn feminist Robin Morgan put it bluntly: "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice". According to anti-porn theory, heterosexual intercourse is a form of male domination and must be totally altered in a way that it isn't harmful to women.¹⁴

Pro-Sex Feminism

Sex-positive feminism, also known as pro-sexfeminism, surfaced in the early 1980s. These feminists, including Betty Dodson and Gayle Rubin, sought to reclaim heterosexual intercourse as a mutually pleasurable experience for women and men. Sex-positive feminism has evolved to cover not only intimate physical relationships, but also the sex industry, including pornography and prostitution. On the opposite end of the spectrum from anti-porn feminism, some strands of sex-positive feminism consider sex industry work a means of empowerment,

¹³ Susan Groag Bell and Karen Offen, eds., *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents, 1750-1950*, 2 vols. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), 1:2, n. 3, on the decision to avoid anachronistic use of the word "feminism."

¹⁴ Barbara Caine, "Feminism, Suffrage, and the Nineteenth-Century English Women's Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 537-50;

not degradation.¹⁵

Thereby, we can outline the changing dynamics of women in the social and political sphere through the movements they propagated. Where women took crucial decisions and were actively involved in public life in hunter-gatherer societies, to the generations of fighting for basic rights like of property and political suffrage.

Re-Defining Feminism- Extending the Scope

Nudism

One of the most known feminist movements these days is #FreeTheNipple. The general idea is that as men are free to walk the streets bare chested and women should be allowed the same too. The basic debate surrounds around the question ‘Why should a women’s chest be sexualized and a men’s chest not?’ It questions the sexualisation of the female body in general in contrast to their male counterparts.

Paying Bills, Financial Independence

It harks back to an era before feminism and gender equality became part of the conversation, when men were usually the sole providers for their families, while most women stayed home to care for the kids. A man who paid for dates showed that he could fill the role of provider, and this supported the model of romantic relationship as transactional, an exchange of money and stability for sex and offspring. The ‘Splitting the Bill’ movement surrounds around the financial independence of women and their ability to pay for something as basic as food for themselves instead of men paying for the entire bill, which can be taken to be as demeaning.

¹⁵ Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1897-1914* (New York: Garland, 19).

Portrayal in Movies & Pop culture- Game of Thrones

A look into today's pop culture can give us an overview of the thoughts surrounding around the concept of feminism. The T.V. series 'Game of Thrones' portrays human beings, their relationships with one another, and the social and political structures that help or hinder them, depending on who they are, irrespective of their sex. It is these portrayals of personal and political struggles that give Game of Thrones such a modern feminist tone.¹⁶

George R.R. Martin, the author of Game of Thrones stated, "Some women hate the female characters. But importantly they hate them as people, because of things that they've done, not because the character is underdeveloped.... Male or female, I believe in painting in shades of grey. All of the characters should be flawed; they should all have good and bad, because that's what I see. Yes, it's fantasy, but the characters still need to be real. To me, being a feminist is about treating men and women the same. I regard men and women as all human—yes, there are differences, but many of those differences are created by the culture that we live in, whether it's the medieval culture of Westeros, or 21st century western culture."¹⁷

Portrayal In Literature

"I stretched my leg nervously to the other side of the bed to grope for the switch and turned it on. The elephant somersaulted inside the quilt which deflated immediately. During the somer-sault the corner of the quilt rose by almost a foot... Good God! I gasped and plunged into my bed."¹⁸ Ismat Chughtai's allegoric exposition of women exploring their sexuality took the 1942-India by storm in the aftermath of which she was booked for obscenity for bearing the audacity to chronicle the story of sexual awakening of a 'Begum' following her unhappy marriage with a 'Nawab'. Her contemporary Saadat Hasan Manto too got into frequent legal feuds with the government for allegedly exuding bawdry through his stories wherein often he talked about

¹⁶ Wilcox, S. (2014, April 28). Women of Westeros. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/30038879/Women of Westeros](https://www.academia.edu/30038879/Women_of_Westeros) <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ <https://medium.com/@literatureguide/review-summary-and-analysis-of-quilt-by-ismat-chughtai-16ec2293521e> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

'taboo' subjects such as prostitution in a nonchalant manner. Chughtai's and Manto's stories often portrayed strong female protagonists who were self-aware enough to take control of their own sexuality and physical desires. Similarly, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote stories which were way ahead of their time with progressive female characters. Their stories humanized the women they chronicled whilst lurking away from any sort of vulgarity or pruriency. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her book 'We Should All Be Feminists' has highlighted about 'the danger of the single story', regarding how stereotypes limit and shame our thinking. The word feminist today and the idea of feminism itself has also been restricted in accord to the stereotypical identities assigned to it today.¹⁹

Separatist And Lesbianism

Separatist feminism is a form of radical feminism that does not support heterosexual relationships. Lesbian feminism is thus closely related. Separatist feminism's proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are unresolvable. Separatist feminists generally do not feel that men can make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Author Marilyn Frye describes separatist feminism as "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege—this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women".²⁰

Marital Re-Abortion Rights

A recent debate has also emerged with regard to marital and abortion rights of women. Abortion rights partake to involve rights of a woman over her own body and the freedom of choice to determine whether she wishes to carry the child or not. Certain legislations throughout the world have criminalized abortions which are being taken on as being barbaric and demeaning to the lives of women.

¹⁹ <https://sol.du.ac.in/mod/book/view.php?id=855&chapterid=538> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

²⁰ van Zoonen, L. (1994). *Feminist media studies*. London: SAGE Publications.

The Equal Pay Debate

The Equal pay for equal work debate took to its feet when women started to appear in the public work spaces in huge numbers. The movement is still quite urban in its approach as it partakes to attack on the institutions and establishments where women are inculcated on a pay-roll.

MeToo Movement

'Me Too' or #MeToo is a movement which was initiated in 2006 by a social activist Tarana Burke against the dire concern of the masses on the matter of sexual abuse and harassment in America. The movement started to gain recognition in October 2017 after Alyssa Milano, an American actress posted a tweet asking the victims and survivors of sexual assault to come out, accepting the bitter truth of the society and letting others know that they are not alone. The idea of "Empowerment through Empathy" was behind the Me Too Movement. It was ultimately created to ensure survivors know they're not alone in their journey.²¹

Beauty Pageants

The 1968 Miss America pageant was the backdrop for one of the most iconic events of modern feminism in the United States. Members from the New York Radical Women organization demonstrated along the Atlantic City boardwalk against the pageant's perceived misogyny. Protesters threw household items that they believed fostered the collective image of submissive females into a large trashcan.²²

Thus ironically, feminism didn't begin as an outright quest for gender equality. It evolved from activism for broad social causes to today's spectrum of female-focused theories and philosophies that span topics from education and pornography to race.

²¹ Evans, Alyssa (2018) "#MeToo: A Study on Sexual Assault as Reported in the New York Times," Occam's Razor: Vol. 8 , Article 3. Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/orwwu/vol8/iss1/3>.

²² Wartenberg, T. E. (1992). Rethinking power. (T. E. Wartenberg, Ed.) Albany: SUNY Press.

Cleaning The Lens: Misunderstandings Surrounding Feminism Today

Feminism however continues to be misidentified and misconstrued. To put it efficiently, feminism is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.” There are a myriad of issues involved in the movement; sexuality, race, rape culture, transgender rights, the list goes on, but “equality” is the gist of it.

Feminism, its loudest proponents vow, is about fighting for equality. Yet, a lot of feminist rhetoric today does cross the line from attacks on sexism into attacks on men, with a strong focus on personal behavior: the way they talk, the way they approach relationships, even the way they sit on public transit. Male faults are stated as sweeping condemnations; objecting to such generalizations is taken as a sign of complicity. Meanwhile, similar indictments of women would be considered grossly misogynistic. Feminist male-bashing has come to sound like a cliché — a misogynist caricature.²³ Feminism, its loudest proponents vow, is about fighting for equality. The man-hating label is either a smear or a misunderstanding. This gender antagonism does nothing to advance the unfinished business of equality. If anything, the fixation on men behaving badly is a distraction from more fundamental issues, such as changes in the workplace to promote work-life balance.²⁴ The 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments catalogued the grievances of “woman” against “man.” However, these grievances were directed more at institutions than at individuals.²⁵ In “The Feminine Mystique,” which sparked the great feminist revival of the 1960s, Betty Friedan saw men not as villains but as fellow victims burdened by societal pressures and by the expectations of their wives, who depended on them for both livelihood and identity.²⁶ That began to change in the 1970s with the rise of radical feminism. This movement, with its slogan, “The personal is political,” brought a wave of female anger at

²³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/30/feminists-treat-men-badly-its-bad-for-feminism/?utm_term=.1129358a7fba <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

²⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/28/female-success-and-male-decline-what-a-star-is-born-tells-us-about-fame-fear-and-feminism> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

²⁵ Esther Kanipe, "The Family, Private Property and the State in France, 1870-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976).

²⁶ On Rereading 'The Woman in America,' " Daedalus [Fall 1987]: 199-210).

men's collective and individual transgressions.²⁷

Things have gotten to a point where casual low-level male-bashing is a constant white noise in the hip progressive online media. Take a recent piece on Broadly, the women's section of Vice, titled, "Men Are Creepy, New Study Confirms" — promoted with a Vice Facebook post that said: "Are you a man? You're probably a creep." The actual study found something very different: that both men and women overwhelmingly think someone described as "creepy" is more likely to be male. If a study had found that a negative trait was widely associated with women (or gays or Muslims), surely this would have been reported as deplorable stereotyping, not confirmation of reality.²⁸ Meanwhile, men can get raked over the (virtual) coals for voicing even the mildest unpopular opinion on something feminism-related. Just recently, YouTube film reviewer James Rolfe, who goes by "Angry Video Game Nerd," was roundly vilified as a misogynistic "man-baby" in social media and the online press after announcing that he would not watch the female-led "Ghostbusters" remake because of what he felt was its failure to acknowledge the original franchise.²⁹

This matters, and not just because it can make men less sympathetic to the problems women face. At a time when we constantly hear that womanpower is triumphant and "the end of men" — or at least of traditional manhood — is nigh, men face some real problems of their own. Women are now earning about 60 percent of college degrees; male college enrollment after high school has stalled at 61 percent since 1994, even as female enrollment has risen from 63 percent to 71 percent. Predominantly male blue-collar jobs are on the decline, and the rise of single motherhood has left many men disconnected from family life. The old model of marriage and fatherhood has been declared obsolete, but new ideals remain elusive.³⁰

Perhaps mocking and berating men is not the way to show that the feminist revolution is about equality and that they have a stake in the new game. The message that feminism can help men,

²⁷ Sylvia Hewitt's, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: Morrow, 1986).

²⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/30/feminists-treat-men-badly-its-bad-for-feminism/?utm_term=.1129358a7fba <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/28/female-success-and-male-decline-what-a-star-is-born-tells-us-about-fame-fear-and-feminism> <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

³⁰ World Bank. "Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice". (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001).

too — by placing equal value on their role as parents or by encouraging better mental health care and reducing male suicide — is undercut by gender warriors like Australian pundit Clementine Ford, whose “ironic misandry” often seems entirely non-ironic and who has angrily insisted that feminism stands only for women. Gibes about “male tears” — for instance, on a T-shirt sported by writer Jessica Valenti in a photo taunting her detractors — seem particularly unfortunate if feminists are serious about challenging the stereotype of the stoic, pain-suppressing male.³¹

Today, when men can lose their jobs because of sexist missteps and be expelled from college over allegations of sexual misconduct, that’s a blinkered view, particularly since the war on male sins can often target individuals’ trivial transgressions. Take the media shaming of former “Harry Potter” podcaster Benjamin Schoen, pilloried for some mildly obnoxious tweets (and then an insufficiently gracious email apology) to a woman who had blocked him on Facebook after an attempt at flirting. While sexist verbal abuse toward women online is widely deplored, there is little sympathy for men who are attacked as misogynists, mocked as “man-babies” or “angry virgins,” or even smeared as sexual predators in Internet disputes.³²

Feminism- Only For The Urbane?

A critical part of the conversation of feminism is still missing. Indian feminism and feminist issues as they stand, most often, are not fully inclusive of all women or experiences. Indian feminism has tended to represent the interests and concerns of upper-caste women rather than reflect the experiences of Indian women en masse. By recognising this fact, Indian feminism can more effectively challenge historically entrenched and varied [systems of oppression].³³

As Indian psychologist Taraasha Chopra explains, "The more education I received, the more aware I became, the conversation on feminism changed. The problems of underprivileged women became nothing more than just facts and figures on a paper. The feminist discourse became more nuanced and we moved on to talking about issues such as socialization, subtle messages of discrimination, rape culture, glass ceilings etc. So the focus of my feminism was

³¹ Zeiss Stange Mary and Oyster Carol K. “The Multimedia Encyclopedia of Women in Today’s World”. (New York: Sage Publications ,2011).

³² Duverger Maurice, “The Political Role of Woman” (Paris : University of Paris,2010).

³³ Cohen, Stephen P. (2001). India: Emerging Power. Brookings Institution Press. p. 21.

more oriented towards the privileged, urban, educated women who were stuck in traditionalist roles while having modern mindsets."³⁴ Intentional or not, complicity in the face of oppressive systems is choosing the side of the oppressor, which by definition is un-feminist.

Intersectionality is defined as the study of intersecting social identities and the related systems of oppression.³⁵ First coined within the context of feminism, it examines social hierarchies that privilege and oppress people based on overlapping aspects of their identity such as: race, gender, class, caste, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and so on. For example, two well-known hierarchal systems in India include the patriarchy, based on gender, and the historical caste system. And though the latter no longer formally exists, its norms and repercussions are still very real within Indian communities. When we examine those who are the most vulnerable to each of these systems, women and Dalits, we see the resulting disadvantage is compounded. A severe iteration of oppression specific to these overlapping identities is in the form of sexual violence. Studies show that Dalit women are disproportionately exposed to violence. Beyond this, the conviction rate for rape cases against all women in India is a mere 25%, but when specifically looking at Dalit women the conviction rate drops to an abysmal 2%. Intersectionality goes to understand that when identities intersect the related discrimination can result in an "experience that is more than the sum of its parts."³⁶

Feminism thus should also be about dismantling the Kyriarchy, i.e., the social system that keeps all intersecting oppressions in place.³⁷ If we are not advocating for the women whose realities do not look or feel like our own, then we are unequivocally a part of the problem. Let us understand that different kinds of oppression are interlinked, and that one can't liberate only one group without the others. It means acknowledging kyriarchy and intersectionality—the fact that along

³⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.in/shenomics/the-ugly-truth-about-feminism-in-india_a_21632435/ <accessed on 13th February 2019>.

³⁵ Singh, S. & Singh, P. (2011). "Shobha De: Deconstructed for Maverick Feminism." In Contemporary Indian Women Novelists in English, Ed. Indu Swami, Sarup: Delhi.

³⁶ Gangoli, Geetanjali. Indian Feminisms – Law, Patriarchies and Violence in India. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007. Print; pages 10–12.

³⁷ Dhir, Gagan. 1998. 'Man to Women', Delhi Times, The Times of India, 9 December.

different axes, we're all both oppressed and oppressors, privileged and disprivileged.³⁸

The key to our liberation is ensuring everyone has an equal chance at success and happiness. It's consciously choosing to be open-minded and inclusive. It's about starting conversations that make us uncomfortable. It's about minimising our role as oppressors, about recusing apathy, as that inevitably hurts us too. It's about viscerally understanding this simple truth, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even if her shackles are very different than my own."

A wide range of feminists argued that by grouping together such a wide spectrum of sexual misbehaviour, #MeToo had lost a sense of nuance, deriding the movement as a mere "Twitter feminism", giving the impression that only narcissistic, social media-obsessed millennials want a reckoning over sexual assault. Feminism has thus come to contain two distinct understandings of sexism, and two wildly different, often incompatible ideas of how that problem should be solved. One approach is individualist, hard-headed, grounded in ideals of pragmatism, realism and self-sufficiency. The other is expansive, communal, idealistic and premised on the ideals of mutual interest and solidarity. The clash between these two kinds of feminism has been starkly exposed by #MeToo, but the crisis is the result of shifts in feminist thought that have been decades in the making. In this light, the diversity and breadth of the #MeToo movement is not a weakness, but a strength. After all, if so many women, with so many different kinds of lives, have experienced the same sexist behaviour from men, then it becomes easier to believe that the problem goes beyond individuals and instead relates to wider cultural forces. The ubiquity of sexual harassment means that an individual can't simply avoid it by making the right choices, or by steeling herself with forceful determination; the demand that she do so begins to look absurd. Call it, then, a conflict between "individualist" and "social" feminisms. In part, the rift is between visions of how to undertake the feminist project, of which tactics are best: whether through individual empowerment, or through collective liberation. But there is a greater moral divide between these two strands of thought, because #MeToo and its critics also disagree over where to locate responsibility for sexual abuse: whether it is a woman's responsibility to navigate, withstand and overcome the misogyny that she encounters, or whether it is the shared

³⁸ Bal, Raka Sinha. 1999. 'Sushma Swaraj: Wife, Mother Politician—A Woman of Our Times', *Life Review*, March-April: 10-13.

responsibility of all of us to eliminate sexism, so that she never encounters it in the first place.³⁹

Redefining Feminism: Conclusion

Feminism in present-day India has been showing some encouraging trends. First, increasing economic liberty is allowing women to fight stereotyping. Second, what women want is changing – from economic rights to social and sexual rights. Third, women are not vacating their spaces – they are negotiating harder to expand them. Fourth, there is genuine partnership and collaboration among men and women, particularly youngsters, to embrace meaningful gender equality. Finally, the internet and information revolution is helping women form communities and networks, giving them a bigger voice and tools to organize themselves, forge partnerships and demand their rights.

Most academics attribute the growth of feminism in India to western influence, disregarding the fact that feminism is multicultural – the needs and problems of women who live in different countries are dissimilar. However, Indians did not have to borrow feminism from the West. Throughout history, Indian women have asserted themselves in multiple ways and broken free of oppressive social norms. These whispers of rebellion were bypassed or ignored by patriarchal documentations, but they were always there and they must be remembered. As it has been stated by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her book , “We must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently. We do a disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard small cage and we put boys inside this cage.”⁴⁰

The author’s own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better.’ All of us, women and

³⁹ Hebert, L. Camille, Is 'MeToo' Only a Social Movement or a Legal Movement Too? (August 21, 2018). Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal, Volume 22, No. 2 (2018); Ohio State Public Law Working Paper No. 453. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3236309> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3236309>.

⁴⁰ ADICHIE, C. N. (2015). We should all be feminists.

men, must do better. "Liberty, unless enjoyed by all, is unreal and illusory".

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