

Feminism and Its Effects on Modern-Day Society

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I. Introduction

'Feminism' – a term many must have heard at least once in the course of their many social interactions, let it be in a negative connotation while discussing with their traditional relatives or rather as a casual debate topic among friends; in the end, it becomes a term that is rather misused and more often than not misinterpreted as a concept.

Feminism, in all its essence, is a socio-political movement that aims to level the playing field for all the genders – that is, it advocates for the rights and equality for all the genders in the predominantly patriarchal society. The key term in this whole definition is 'all genders'; a term that many don't normally associate with feminism as people only think that it deals with the rights of the females only since feminism has the term 'fem' in it. Quite misleading for sure, but just like how mankind does not only refer to the male part of humanity, feminism also does not advocate for only females.

II. History of Feminism

Upon peeking into the history of feminism, many may observe that females were the ones that started the movement – not exactly surprising since the whole society was built around the ideology that males are the dominant ones while females were treated barely better than some property or possession of a man.

This can be observed through the several 'traditions' that the Indian society had that asked for the women to sacrifice themselves completely for a man – the Sati system being such an infamous example where the recently widowed women were burned alive alongside her late husband's funeral pyre. The foundation of the whole dowry system was also based on this very concept that females are nothing more than a possession to man and unfortunately enough, they were even treated as such with these orthodox traditions.

This mentality along with the immense discriminations females faced due to the society's fixed perception of them, feminism came into existence; especially when females gradually went against the societal norms to step up as successful individuals who called out the backward

thinking of the society and forced people to acknowledge the apparent sexism. And while the history of feminism is quite a long and persisting one, it is the one that helped humanity develop the most as the whole movement caused massive changes in the political and legal scenario of the entire world.

The first wave of feminism had started with the objective to bring equal voting and property inheritance rights to females, which soon transformed into the second wave that called for equality and laws against discrimination as women started stepping in toe-to-toe with men on many fields. However, the second wave soon disclosed a backdrop of the whole movement – while feminism did advocate for equality for all genders, in reality only the upper class or more privileged of the bunch actually got any benefit from the movement.¹ This caused the third wave of feminism that led to the whole backlash on the privileged, causing the people standing at the intersectionality of the oppressions to finally come into the light.

III. Feminism and Intersectionality

Intersectionality, in simple terms, is the overlapping of two or more oppressions like racism, sexism, and homophobia all at the same time, rather than being individually present. This causes the multiplication of oppression, resulting in the person standing at the said intersection facing way more trouble than those who only face one oppression.

Due to the intersectionality of gender with other oppressions, several changes were gradually introduced into the legal provisions to decrease discrimination against women. What started with voting and inheritance rights, soon changed to more anti-discriminatory laws that were made for the protection and empowerment of women? Examples of such provisions can be seen as laws against dowry, sexual harassment, rape, and other heinous gender-based crimes that soon helped to build a complete legal system aimed to protect and empower the already socially backwards females.

And while some may advocate that there is no need for such gender-based laws in today's era, people often forget that it's difficult to overcome centuries of generational discrimination that is still very much ingrained in the society even with such progressive laws present in the nation. These laws are necessary and quite needed to level the playing field – the positive

¹ Martha Rampton, *Four Waves of Feminism*, Pacific University Oregon(25 oct 2015), <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>.

discrimination due to these laws causes the representation of various genders and give them the equal footing as the men in our patriarchal society has already been provided the platform for.

Reservations for females in educational as well as political institutions and banning of gender detecting ultrasounds are some of the classic gender-based laws that have helped to prevent discrimination against females, giving an outlet for the women to help their representation on a significant level. This positive discrimination in law is needed to curb the social discrimination faced by women in the work and educational field.

In the terms of a more specific example, the case of *Shah Bano* can be mentioned, where a Muslim woman who was seeking alimony after the divorce was facing a lot of discrimination on the account of her being Muslim and a woman, on top of it.² In this scenario, the petitioner was standing at the intersection of discrimination against her religion as well as her gender, making her problems double in number as people discriminated against her for her religion while the people belonging to her community and religion were condemning her for going against her husband.

For this particular case of intersectionality, the Indian Judiciary ruled out the judgement in her favour that helped to abolish the religious law of Triple Talaq and brought in proper laws for Muslim divorced women. Against all the societal expectations and discriminations, law prevailed and helped the females get the help they needed – a strong move that was influenced by the feminist mentality.

And while many examples of the feminist movement involve females and their struggles, feminism has also helped to bring attention to the other genders under the LGBTQ+ community who stand at the intersectionality of discrimination against gender and sexuality due to their socially deviant expression of their gender as well as sexual identity. And while homosexuality is very recently decriminalized due to the efforts of the feminist movement, the discrimination they face in society is yet to decrease; especially in the case of female queer people, as we can

² Prachi Bhardwaj, *In the historic judgment, SC says that Triple Talaq is not fundamental to Islam; Practice set aside by a 3:2 majority*, SCC Blog(22Aug 2017), <https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2017/08/22/in-the-historic-judgment-sc-says-that-triple-talaq-is-not-fundamental-to-islam-practice-set-aside-by-a-32-majority/>.

see through the several cases of the police as well as the family of the lesbians or trans women harassing the said queer persons.³

IV. People's perception about Feminism

Feminism, as a social, cultural, political as well as economic movement has helped society as a whole, spreading the ideology of equal rights and respect of all the genders across all the platforms – however, as stated earlier in the article, feminism is a concept that is rather misunderstood due to its negative interpretation by many that perceive it as nothing but a ‘men hating’ movement.

Ironically enough, many do not realize that feminism is not a movement against men but rather a movement against misogyny and discrimination faced by the rest of the gender because they do not belong to the male gender. Essentially, feminism stands against the notion that men are superior, as often portrayed by our society and its traditions; instead holds all the genders at an equal pedestal that many don't realize, nor do they support.

Despite all this, the misconception about feminism stands uncorrected and that became glaringly obvious during the recent incident in Lucknow of a woman slapping a cab driver several times without any justifiable reason. The incident came into a highlight due to a video of the act being recorded and posted over social media, making it go viral all over the country as the female thrashed the cab driver and destroyed his mobile.

While what she did had nothing to do with feminism or even represented as such, people started calling out the whole incident as an effect of feminism – falsely claiming that this is what feminism means and stands for. Meanwhile, as some went with the hashtag ‘fake feminism’ to call out the act as slander on the feminist movement, a lot many people pipped up with their misconception, declaring feminism to be anti-men and advocating it as nothing more than a tool for women to misuse against men, just like how in the said incident the female slapped the male cab driver several times.⁴

³ Sudharshan Vardhan, *Indian court calls for sweeping reforms to respect LGBT rights*, Reuters, Reuters (7 June 2021, 9:26 PM) <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indian-court-calls-sweeping-reforms-respect-lgbt-rights-2021-06-07/> .

⁴ Times of India staff, *Lucknow Girl Beating Cab Driver: Netizens battle it out after Lucknow girl thrashes speeding cab driver*, TOI (2 August 2021, 19:36 IST), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/faceoff-netizens-battle-it-out-after-lucknow-girl-thrashes-speeding-cab-driver/articleshow/84973014.cms>.

Moreover, the said woman's claim over her act being in 'self-defence'⁵ further cemented many people's view over feminism as the term kept being used in a completely unrelated context without many even realizing what it actually meant. In the end, it does not matter what was the reason behind the girl's action – her way of attacking the cab driver was unjustified and warranted legal action against her, which the local police did initiate once they reached the scene.

V. Conclusion

Amongst this whole chaos of a situation in Lucknow, one thing became glaringly clear – and that was how feminism is viewed in India and how unaware many are regarding this socio-political movement. It is high time we address this misconception and educate people on what the term means and stands for; as well as move forward with the ideology of bringing actual equality between all the genders rather than just on the papers.

In the end, it all starts with awareness and educating oneself about the topic – it is easy to sit in our comfort zone and make comments that we are privileged enough to make and be heard, while many out there don't even have the luxury to talk out loud their problems as they are threatened over for their basic fundamental rights. With such privilege, we must help amplify the voice of the needful instead of standing on the sidelines; that is the only way we can help to bridge the gap of equality and curb the age-old misogynist system.

⁵ Smartha Srivastava, *Police serves notice to Lucknow woman who slapped cab driver*, I.Today (8 August 2021, 23:56), <https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/lucknow/story/police-serves-notice-to-lucknow-woman-who-slapped-cab-driver-exclusive-1838478-2021-08-08>.