

Empowering Women, Empowering Generations...

I want to apologize to all the women
I have called pretty
Before I've called them intelligent or brave
I am sorry I made it sound as though
Something as simple as what you're born with
Is the most you have to be proud of when your
Spirit has crushed mountains
From now on I will say things like
You are resilient or you are extraordinary
Not because I don't think you're pretty
But because you are so much more than that.

This comforting poem by Rupi Kaur which is an epitome of what women can be rather than of what women are expected; igniting a kind of revolution happening inside of us which says that we don't need to hear that we are pretty, even if society tells us that we need to be as pretty as possible to be successful. And hence, I guess this is where the heart and soul of what being a **Feminist** means.

Feminism is a noble concept against ignoble thought of discrimination on the grounds of sex. At the outset, the division of gender roles was based on the capacity to bear and nourish the babies

and; to keep provisions ready in the entire time span. The division had no arguments for thousands of years; but was later on challenged sometimes lightly and sometimes intensely. This may be due to men taking their roles more seriously and undermining female roles or negating them completely in the whole progression of existence. Men's physical strength, their ability to hunt (in modern times their money making skills) and freedom from child bearing liabilities made them high headed and arrogant towards female. Under this backdrop we can see the creation of patriarchal society in which all social norms were created and controlled by men, making women a passive partner in the whole course.

Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality of sexes. It initiated in the west, exhibited throughout the world and was exemplified by countless people and institutions committed to action on belief of women's rights and interests. To speak in a lucid way, to be a feminist is simply to believe that everybody should be treated equally, regardless of sex. It means that there should be equality of the sexes economically, socially, politically and personally. When you put it like that, it's surely difficult for anybody to deny being a feminist. But for such a simple concept, it is often dramatically misunderstood.

For me, feminism is not to take from men but just trying to raise the same level as what men have. My father, is also a feminist because he wants to see his daughter well educated so she can succeed in her career and never be dependent on anybody. There is no shame in accepting you are a feminist because you support gender equality. Many men believe it is not "manly" to be a feminist. Due to concepts like these, even when men support their mother, wife, daughters, or female friends, they maintain silence in fear of being emasculated (weakened), mocked, and outcasted. Worst of all, some men think

giving women equal rights means having to give up their own rights, which is a far cry from the reality of the situation. The feminist movement is not 'anti-man' so much as it's anti the patriarchal society we live in, which has historically favored men. You can be a feminist and still love men as fathers, brothers, partners, sons, friends, and fellow human beings. According to me, **Being a Feminist is the most Masculine feeling ever!**

When we go deeper into the studies of Feminism and its beliefs, we get to know that it says that the notion of sex being biological difference is mixed up and conflated with gender. In other words, feminists believe that gender refers to different roles society gives men and women. Historically, the "gender" role given to women is basically serving men and not having much power. To speak in context with patriarchy, Feminists believe that the way society, state and economy is still currently structured is to oppress women and take power away from them and they advocate this to be shifted leading to balance in power. While mentioning patriarchy, there is misconception that Feminists love all women alike. But it is not true because women are equally responsible for letting the nation get devoured by patriarchy ever since we formed a society. Just like every man may not be a patriarch, not all women support equal rights. There are some who promote regressive notions about how women have, are, and will always be inferior to men and that they need men to survive in this world, as much as anyone else. And, that is precisely the mindset feminism aims at eradicating. And, thus, it doesn't matter whether the person in question is a man or a woman. Real feminists despise women who advocate matriarchy as much as they hate the supporters of patriarchy.

As for the 'feminists' who do hate men, they are better understood as 'feminazis'. Feminazis who claim women are better than men

comprise the far extreme of feminism. But according to me as far as "Feminazis" are concerned, if your feminism is not intersectional, is not trans-inclusive, if it's racist, then it's not feminism! Because enunciating intersectionality, Black, Asian and Working-class women's experience of patriarchy in state, society and economy are different from White and Middle-class women. Because, **Oppression is not equal**. Also, Feminism isn't just "women's issues." It helps fight racism/classism/ableism/ageism/patriarchy/homophobia/sexual orientation, etc. and everyone can be a feminist, regardless of race, gender, class, religion, ability, etc." For example, if a man wants to be a hairstylist or a nurse or a teacher, jobs typically reserved or associated with women, they should be allowed to. Yet, the same goes for women. If a woman wants to be an astronaut or a construction worker or a stay-at-home mom, they should be allowed to. Feminists are typically portrayed in a bad light and that needs to change.

Then why even after so many years there are so many misunderstandings regarding feminism- it has been associated with strong, forceful and angry women, and our society continues to punish forceful women. Many people fear that feminism will mean that men will eventually lose out – of power, influence, impact, authority, and control, and economic opportunities. It is also a misconception that feminists want to control the world and put men down. Also people fear that feminism will overturn time-honored traditions, religious beliefs and established gender roles, and that feels scary and wrong; it will bring about negative shifts in relationships, marriage, society, culture, power and authority dynamics, and in business, job and economic opportunities if and when women are on an equal footing with men. There is also a myth that women can't be feminine and be a feminist at the same time. But the truth is Feminism is fundamentally about giving women choices, not about finding new

ways to limit their self-expression; provided that women recognize that the choice to act in a traditionally feminine manner is just that - a choice - it is entirely acceptable and even quite common within the feminist movement.

Hence while concluding, I feel that the key message of feminism in the 21st century society should highlight choice in bringing a personal meaning to feminism is to recognise others' right to do the exact same thing. Women all over the world nationally, regionally and globally should be able to embrace this powerful message of feminism and be able to create a positive meaning of their own womanhood and femininity. However, despite feminism being a strong successful movement, inequality and exploitation of women still exist and sadly there are women today, who are trapped in a society which doesn't value them and leaves them neither choice nor freedom to express their views and rights. A lot of young people think that women's rights has already been accomplished but they don't realize there are still so many forces against women's rights, like reproductive rights and pay equity. A new generation is growing up seeing feminism as both a responsibility and a legacy to carry and accomplish. Feminism is a basic Human Rights movement in today's world. It means women and men working together to make our communities better for all of us and it is necessary that we strive for its cause wholely and rightfully As journalist David Alejandro Fearnhead rightly said, "**Life is not a competition between men and woman. It is a collaboration.**"

Neha Adesh Shaha.