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FEMINISM, A BATTLE CRY

Krishna Chaturvedi

Manipal University , Jaipur

Feminism has been one of the most controversial cum successful social movements of this age. One can trace the roots of Feminism back to ancient Greece, but mostly it took its shape through the “three waves of feminism”. The first wave between 1830s – early 1900s focused on women’s equal potential and contribution in property and contract, if not more than their counterparts, men. The second wave between 1960s – 1980s focused on sexuality, workplace and reproductive rights. The third wave of feminism took place between 1990s – early 2000s receiving its own share of backlash. During early 1990s woman calling themselves as “Feminists” were looked upon through a negative stereotypical image of someone smashing glass ceilings, obsessing over pink, man-hating, having lack of femininity. This led to many people rejecting the label of “Feminist”.

In the present scenario, Feminism has grown gradually on people, highlighting the importance of why we still need it and it is more diverse than ever before including wider range of oppressions faced in the form of gender norms, stereotypes, including trans-people and men. Feminism has taken a step ahead of “**sexism**”. The **Muslimah Media Watch**, a forum letting Muslim women represent how they are portrayed in the media and popular culture or **The HeforShe** campaign, encouraging men to advocate for gender equality, or the **#MeToo Campaign**, helping people to come out with their stories of oppression or violation of their rights, are one of the few examples of this.

The fight for equality may seem unnecessary to the privileged lot who never had to compete for the equal pay, who were never daunted by abortion laws, never were subject to sexual harassment or looked down upon because of their genders. That’s understandable that some of us live in a bubble, where it’s hard to accept the perspective of someone living outside it. Going by this logic we may concur that “equality and protection of men and women is guaranteed by law” or “Gender equality is relevant crisis only in under-developed countries”. But Feminism focuses on individualistic experiences of people which differ dramatically but ultimately comes out from same cultural roots. And a part of dealing with this situation is to make people more aware about feminism in society.

Although more and more people are educating themselves with the true idea behind feminism yet there always has been a negative aspect attached to it. It’s the way media tries to portray the most extreme version of this social movement which portrays a very insensitive image of a “**feminist**” like someone who hates lipstick and frowns upon stay-at-home moms. False assumptions like these result in anti-feminist campaigns

like “**women against feminism**” which consists of people back-lashing on the idea of feminism without being educated about it.

As Lena Dunham pointed out “Feminism isn’t a dirty word: it’s not like we are deranged group who think women should take over the planet, raise our young on our own and eliminate men from the planet.” Being a feminist is not about how you look, what your wear, what religion you are from, what race you belong to or how you deserve any special right over others. All feminism stands for is to believe in the idea of having equal political, economic and social rights for any human being and it starts with empowering women because oppression of women has its own history. Some might still say it assumes certain gender role that places expectations upon men to act in a certain way. Whereas, Feminism gives platform to a person on the basis of their individual strengths and capabilities.

Now the question arises of if we still need feminism. Some people might believe that it is a thing of past and we are a generation of being “woke”. According to demographics, females vote more than men do. Still only 20% of congress seats are taken over by women in Indian Politics. Some might believe there are equal employment opportunities because of the debate going around smashing patriarchy, but still there is a pay gap of 23% between men and women. It’ll come off as a surprise that women have the right to equal pay according to the Equal Remuneration Act, “without any discrimination”. It has been years since women in Britain won the right to vote, or women in Dubai got the right to have a license and drive. Most will argue that Feminism – a movement to uplift the women of our society – is no longer required.

We need feminism because it’s more of a humanitarian issue and not a gender issue anymore. It’s not about victimising a gender and make special provisions. It’s about uplifting every human being despite their genders. It’s about giving up on the idea of being gender obsessed and break the stereotype of “blue for boys and pink for girls”. The easiest way to deal with the scepticism over if we need feminism or not is to walk past the notion that gender inequality does not exist. According to United Nations, one in three women is beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by any intimate partner in the course of her lifetime. In Britain, analysis from Crime Survey of England and Wales revealed that in the **12 months** leading up to **2017** over **510000** women experienced some type of sexual assault, or rape or attempt to rape or assault by penetration. Some people will say feminism is not about equality but about pinning men down and neglecting their problems. On the other hand every issue that men face in today’s time has its roots in outdated gender stereotypes that feminist are committed to tackling. The gender stereotypes are like the two sides of coin where it is expected from men to be less emotional, have more physical strength and act in certain mannerism. Whereas women are considered to be over emotional and hysterical. Feminism is here to tackle all these gender equality, which would help everybody, regardless of their sex. Some might still argue that feminism is not needed because it has nothing to do with them. This act of ignorance prevents them from realising that feminism has its benefits at much wider organisational and societal level. Research has shown that gender diversity in a company is correlated to high productivity. At an international level, country’s peacefulness is not determined by its wealth but by its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity; but reality is quite heartbreaking. Some might still argue that if it’s a humanitarian issue, then why not call it “**Humanism**” or “**Egalitarianism**” instead of “**Feminism**”. The closest logical argument to that would be that in order to solve a problem, you have to name it first. We use the label “Feminism” because it is women who are disproportionately harmed by gender inequality, in its structural, systematic form. Of course men also suffer in a misogynistic society and many of the struggles faced by them can be alleviated by dismantling gendered stereotypes and power dynamics.

Feminism isn't about glossy hair, or flashy clothes, calling everything women do “**empowering**”, no matter how much advertisers might like you to believe it. It isn't about hating men or forcing decency on them or having vindictive power trips, or wasting time trying to skew statistics. It's a battle cry against the discrimination, inequality, harassment, violence and abuse that affected millions of lives for centuries and is still needed today.

