

# Demystifying labeled Feminism

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Samira Shakya

The contributor for Republica.  
[news@myrepublica.com](mailto:news@myrepublica.com)

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*Feminism is all about treating everyone equally, including men.*

The term "feminist" often evokes a range of reactions varying from admiration to disdain. People who believe in equality for all in every aspect of life, despite their sexual identity, consider feminists as: empowered, trailblazers, champions, visionaries. However, and unfortunately, misunderstandings about feminism also continue to exist, and are kept alive by people who stick to old-fashioned beliefs and biases. These people frequently target and label feminists, as: killjoy, man-haters, potential divorcees, forever singles, perpetually angry, feminazis, etc. Some believe only women can be feminists.

A male colleague and a supporter of feminism once told me that men are usually hesitant to openly declare themselves as feminists because of the term "feminist" itself and that men perceive feminism as solely concerning women, by women, and for women. He shared his own example of understanding the feminist theory and principles only after being involved in social movements.

His views resonate with the famous actor Matt Damon who once said in an interview that he was not quite comfortable with the term feminist until he learned what feminism actually meant. After the discussion on the definition by bell hooks "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" he quickly said "Alright, then I am one". My male colleague I referred to earlier, views feminism as an ideology—one that encompasses gender equality and challenges oppressive practices. Indeed, feminism is not exclusively about women.

Let's think for a while – Who wouldn't desire to live in a fair and just world for everyone, regardless of gender, caste, race, or economic status? Those who believe in creating such a world are feminists at heart regardless of their sex.

Right to be paid and treated equally, the freedom and independence to work outside the home, right to health and hygiene, right to identity, and sexual freedom are the fundamentals of a rights-based society. One who adheres to these beliefs is a feminist. Feminism strives for profound cultural transformations, aiming to eradicate sexism and intersectional oppression rooted in gender, race, sexuality, and class perpetuated by patriarchal belief that upholds the position of a heterosexual man as supreme in all of the societal spheres.

We have heard numerous stories of people struggling to make their vital documents. Bina from Godawari has been visiting her ward office to apply for citizenship for more than six months now, but she hasn't received it yet. Her unmarried mother became pregnant at a young age and the man who should have been her father disappeared. Raised solely by her mother, Bina now faces difficulties obtaining citizenship because she has no information about her father. It's a striking paradox that someone absent from Bina's life holds significant importance in a legal document but the one who gave birth and raised her single-handedly is not recognized as a citizen.

Although there's a provision now that people born in Nepal from a Nepali mother can obtain citizenship through their mother's name, it's still a struggle for people like Bina. Her mother, despite her pivotal role in Bina's life, is not acknowledged as a legitimate parent simply because she is not a father. Why is her mother not an equal citizen as Bina's "disappeared, coward, irresponsible" father? Isn't this something to be outraged about? Anger is just one of many emotions that feminists exhibit. It can make anyone sympathize with the mother and criticize the man who left Bina and her mother. Those who can feel this pain have feminism in them. Their frustration and anger are understandable responses to these systemic injustices, but they also

share compassion, hope, and desire for a just and equitable world for all. Feminism points at the bigger picture where different types of discrimination are interconnected. It is important to address issues that affect gender minorities. Systemic discrimination and oppression are not only faced by women but also by non-binary individuals.

Ojas Rana changed his name to Kiran because it sounded more unisex. Kiran didn't identify with being labeled as strictly male. However, Kiran didn't identify as female either. Kiran's parents enrolled them in a boys' school, where they endured years of bullying and physical abuse, suffering in silence without anyone to confide in. After high school, Kiran found solace among some female friends who understood their struggles and accepted them as they were. However, spending long hours in college without access to a safe restroom became a daily challenge. With no separate facilities, Kiran felt unsafe using the men's restroom due to the fear of harassment. Kiran refrained from drinking tea, coffee, or water to avoid needing the restroom. Kiran is only a representative case that highlights the need for acceptance and a dignified life. There are countless challenges like bullying, exclusion, sexual abuse, slim employment opportunities, that they face daily, all while also needing to worry about basic necessities like access to toilets.

When feminists identify such societal imbalances, they may be seen as killjoy by those who benefit from traditional norms and power structures that are harmful and disrespectful to other genders. Feminists challenge and disrupt these structures, which can create discomfort or pose a threat to individuals who prefer the status quo of imbalanced power structures. For e.g. feminists challenge traditional gender roles that dictate caregiving and household responsibilities as exclusively belonging to

women, while providing for the family is seen as the role of men. All sex can fulfill a variety of roles, and we have seen this in our lives. Sexual identity should not impede anyone from reaching their goals. Regardless of gender and sexual identity, anyone can be a spouse/partner, a homemaker, an astronaut, a business tycoon, a pilot, or a president of a country. When given access, opportunity, skills and knowledge, all sexes are fully capable of achieving their dreams.

I've often encountered questions about using the term "feminist" instead of "genderist" if feminism spoke for all genders. It's true that feminism emerged from a historical context primarily focused on advocating for women's rights and addressing gender inequalities that disproportionately affected women. However, over the time, feminism has evolved to embrace a broader understanding of gender equality, which includes advocating for the rights and experiences of people of all genders. While "genderist" [not sure if the word exists] may appear to be a more inclusive term, it lacks the deep historical and cultural significance associated with feminism. Moreover, feminism carries a powerful emphasis on challenging patriarchal structures and acknowledging the unique struggles women have faced throughout history.

On the other hand, misandry is not a means to combat inequality and does not embody feminist principles. Hatred or prejudice against men contradicts the core values of feminism. Feminism is all about treating everyone equally, including men. Harboring negative feelings towards men contradicts the principle of feminism. It's important to note that feminists today advocate for intersectional feminism, which acknowledges and addresses the intersecting oppressions based on gender, race,

sexuality, class, and other factors. This inclusive approach aims to dismantle all forms of oppression and inequality, regardless of gender. So, are you not a feminist?