

Perspectives of Men Toward Feminism: A Case Study of an Educational Institute

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Abstract

In contemporary society, discussions surrounding feminism have increasingly been accompanied by debates over its perceived misrepresentation and alleged misuse, often labeled as “pseudo” or “fake” feminism. Such narratives have contributed to confusion, particularly among men, and in some instances have diverted attention from women who require genuine gender-just support and empowerment. Within this context, the present study examines men’s perceptions and interpretations of feminism in an educational institutional setting. The research seeks to explore how men define feminism, the extent to which they incorporate feminist principles into their everyday interactions, and the influence of socio-cultural backgrounds on their attitudes and beliefs. Adopting a case study approach, the study collected data from 30 male participants aged 18 to 45 years using a self-designed interview schedule. A mixed-methods framework was employed, combining quantitative analysis to identify general trends with qualitative insights to capture personal viewpoints and lived experiences. The findings indicate that most respondents support the ideas of gender equality and women’s empowerment; however, their understanding of feminism remains fragmented and is often shaped by prevailing social norms, cultural conditioning, media narratives, and individual experiences. The study further reveals that men’s engagement with feminist ideas is neither uniform nor simplistic, but rather layered and context-dependent. These results highlight the importance of structured gender-sensitization initiatives within educational institutions to promote informed, inclusive, and balanced understandings of feminism. Strengthening dialogue and awareness in such spaces can contribute to more constructive male participation in advancing gender equity and social justice.

Keywords: Case study, educational institute, feminism, gender equality, men, perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Feminism encompasses diverse definitions and ideological strands; however, at its core, it advocates equal rights and opportunities for all genders. It seeks to level structural inequalities between men and women and to ensure that women and girls enjoy the same social, political, and economic opportunities as men [1]. Feminism also emphasizes understanding how gender-based inequalities affect everyone and underscores collective responsibility in achieving equality. True gender equality, therefore, is inclusive and leaves no one behind [2].

Despite its foundational principles, feminism is often misunderstood. In contemporary discourse, some sections of society perceive feminism as antagonistic towards men or as a tool for unjust advantage [3]. Such perceptions have contributed to resistance among men and the emergence of

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stereotypes surrounding feminist movements [4]. Understanding men's perspectives on feminism thus becomes crucial, particularly in educational institutions where attitudes, values, and social consciousness are actively shaped [5].

RISE OF FEMINISM IN INDIA

Post-Independence Phase (1947–1960)

Women's participation in India's freedom struggle fostered a critical consciousness regarding their rights and roles in independent India. This period witnessed the incorporation of equal civic and political rights for women in the Indian Constitution. Legislative reforms, such as the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Hindu Succession Act (1956), Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), and Maternity Benefit Act (1961), marked significant milestones. Women's organizations, such as the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), established in 1954, played a vital role in advocating women's rights and empowerment.

Phase of Mobilization and Protest (1960s–1975)

The late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by economic crises, rising prices, and growing discontent. Women's organizations, such as the Shramik Mahila Sangathan, mobilized working-class women, while movements, like the anti-price rise agitation, brought women from diverse political backgrounds together. This period also witnessed the emergence of autonomous feminist groups that addressed issues such as dowry, sexual harassment, violence against women, and obscenity. The celebration of International Women's Day in 1975 symbolized the growing visibility of feminist consciousness in India.

Post-1975 to Present

Since 1975, the women's movement in India has expanded significantly, addressing issues such as violence against women, liquor prohibition, missing girl children, media representation, and the rights of Dalit and marginalized women. The establishment of the National Commission for Women in 1992 and constitutional amendments providing 33% reservation for women in local self-governance institutions marked critical advancements. Subsequent Five-Year Plans emphasized women's empowerment, access to health and education, and political participation, reinforcing the state's commitment to gender equality [6].

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF FEMINISM

Feminism is not a movement aimed at undermining men; rather, it challenges patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality. It does not seek female superiority but strives for parity in status, opportunities, and rights. Feminism critiques behaviors and systems that degrade women while advocating for social transformation that benefits all genders. Fundamentally, feminism promotes justice, dignity, and equality [7].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature highlights feminism as a collective of movements and ideologies aimed at establishing gender equality. The evolution of feminism in India, emphasizing its changing perceptions before and after independence [2]. Feminism as a socio-political awareness movement addressing gender discrimination and advocating equal opportunities [1].

Theoretical perspectives, such as hegemonic masculinity, explain men's resistance to feminism as a perceived challenge to traditional power structures [8]. Conversely, rigid gender norms also constrain men, and that adopting feminist values can promote healthier masculinities. Studies further emphasize the role of educational institutions in shaping men's attitudes toward gender equality and fostering allyship in feminist movements [8, 9].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the concept of feminism from the perspective of men.
- To understand how men practice feminist values in their daily lives.

- To examine the relationship between cultural background and perspectives on feminism.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study design. A total of 30 male respondents aged between 18 and 45 years were selected from a single educational institute to ensure specificity and contextual depth. The study focused exclusively on men. Variables included socio-economic background, religion, education, and perspectives on feminism. Data were collected using a self-structured interview schedule. Both quantitative (descriptive statistics) and qualitative (thematic analysis) methods were employed for data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The respondents comprised students (43.3%) and employees of the educational institution (56.7%). A majority belonged to the 20–30 age group (67%). Most respondents were from the Hindu religion (90%), and the majority had completed undergraduate or postgraduate education as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-economic profile.

Socio economic background of respondent					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Occupation	Student	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
	Service	17	56.7	56.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Age	20–30	20	67	67	67
	31–40	4	13.2	13.2	80.2
	41–55	6	19.8	19.8	100
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Religion	Hindu	27	90.0	90.0	90.0
	Jain	1	3.3	3.3	93.3
	Islam	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Education	HSC	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
	UG	9	30.0	30.0	56.7
	PG	9	30.0	30.0	86.7
	M. Phil.	1	3.3	3.3	90.0
	Ph.D.	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Most respondents who were surveyed supported women's employment even when the husband is well-earning, emphasizing independence and personal choice. Others viewed employment as contingent upon family circumstances or rising living expenses, reflecting a mix of progressive and conditional attitudes as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Attitudes towards women's employment.

Opinion whether a woman should work when her husband is well earning					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, they should be independent	13	43.3	43.3	43.3
	Not required	2	6.7	6.7	50.0
	Her decision	8	26.7	26.7	76.7
	Depends on the couple/family	4	13.3	13.3	90.0
	Yes, the expenses have increased	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Opinions on menstrual leave varied. While nearly half supported the provision of menstrual leave, others preferred conditional approaches based on health or work nature, highlighting concerns about misuse and workplace feasibility as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Menstrual leave.

Views on demand of menstrual leaves					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Leave should be given	14	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Leave should be given depending on the health of particular woman	5	16.7	16.7	63.3
	Leave should be given only in the fields involving excessive fatigue	1	3.3	3.3	66.7
	Not required, women can take leave if they're in pain	5	16.7	16.7	83.3
	No comments	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Respondents expressed mixed views on the association between feminism and false sexual assault complaints. While some believed feminism is misused in certain cases, others emphasized individual responsibility rather than blaming feminism as an ideology as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Feminism and false complaints.

Opinion of respondent on feminism responsible for false complaints of sexual assault					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	7	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Yes, but in rare cases	4	13.3	13.3	36.7
	No, it depends on women	5	16.7	16.7	53.3
	Feminism is used in a wrong way	11	36.7	36.7	90.0
	Such women should be punished	1	3.3	3.3	93.3
	No comments	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to capture the range of meanings, perceptions, and attitudes expressed by the respondents. The analysis revealed several interrelated themes reflecting men's understanding of feminism, their acceptance or resistance to feminist ideas, and the influence of socio-cultural norms on their views [10].

Conceptual Understanding of Feminism

Respondents expressed diverse yet largely normative understandings of feminism. Many perceived feminism as a movement for justice, equality, and empowerment of women. Feminism was described as a struggle for women's rights, a belief system advocating equality, and a means to achieve equal opportunities for all genders. Several respondents emphasized respect, dignity, and social justice as core elements of feminism, indicating a broad awareness of its foundational principles.

Perceived Need for Feminism in the Contemporary Context

Opinions regarding the continued relevance of feminism were divided. Most participants actually felt that feminism remains necessary until gender equality is fully accepted by men and institutionalized in society. Others argued that feminism is less relevant in developed or urban areas and is more needed in rural or semi-urban contexts. Some respondents suggested that social awareness and education are more important than movements, emphasizing changes in societal mentality and sensibility over activism. A few participants believed that feminism has become redundant due to women's increasing independence and access to government schemes [11].

Perceptions of Gender-Based Concessions (MSRTC Bus Concessions)

Views on travel concessions for women reflected both supportive and critical perspectives. Supporters viewed the policy as a positive step toward empowerment, increased mobility, and support for economically disadvantaged women. Critics argued that such concessions should be need-based rather than gender-based, cautioning that universal concessions might reinforce perceptions of dependency or lead to reverse discrimination. These responses highlight tensions between equality-based and equity-based approaches to policy.

Attitudes Toward Reservation for Women

Respondents expressed mixed views on reservation for women in corporate sectors and local self-governance. While some endorsed reservation as a necessary tool for empowerment and social development, others opposed it on the grounds of merit and equal opportunity. A recurring perspective was that reservation should be temporary and discontinued once adequate representation is achieved. Several respondents differentiated between sectors, suggesting that reservation is less necessary in corporate spaces but remains relevant in local governance.

Perceptions of Women in Leadership Roles

Most respondents rejected the notion that women are incapable of handling higher positions. Leadership was largely associated with skills, competence, and experience rather than gender. However, a minority expressed concerns about emotional decision-making, reflecting persistent gender stereotypes. Overall, the findings indicate cautious acceptance of women in leadership, tempered by traditional assumptions about emotionality and learning curves.

Decision-Making Capacities of Women

Views on women's decision-making abilities were similarly divided. Many respondents considered the claim that women are incapable of decision-making to be false and attributed such limitations to lack of exposure or experience rather than gender. Others felt that emotional factors might influence decisions in certain situations. These responses suggest an acknowledgment of social conditioning as a barrier while simultaneously reproducing gendered assumptions.

Men's Role in Domestic Responsibilities

Respondents reported varying levels of involvement in household work. Several men stated that they can manage domestic responsibilities independently, particularly when required by circumstances. Others acknowledged initial difficulty but emphasized that responsibility leads to learning and adaptability. These narratives reflect a gradual shift toward shared domestic roles, though not uniformly internalized. These results are supported to importance of socialization for men [12].

Men's Responses to Women's Menstrual Health

Responses regarding care during menstruation revealed a spectrum of attitudes. While some men actively supported women by providing care and assistance, others perceived menstruation as a private matter requiring no special attention. The findings indicate both emerging sensitivity and persistent discomfort or detachment regarding menstrual health.

Attitudes Toward Women's Social Interactions

Most respondents reported neutral or accepting attitudes toward women being friendly with male friends, provided boundaries are maintained. Trust, safety, and the character of male friends were highlighted as key considerations. These responses reflect conditional acceptance rooted in notions of propriety and mutual respect. These views support the results relationship between male and feminism [10–11].

Dressing, Freedom, and Feminism

Opinions on dress as a feminist issue were mixed. While many supported women's autonomy in choosing their attire, this support was often qualified by expectations regarding modesty, context, and cultural appropriateness. Several respondents viewed dress-related debates as peripheral to the core objectives of feminism, indicating selective acceptance of feminist claims [13].

Feminism and Women's Safety

Respondents differed on whether feminism is necessary primarily due to concerns about women's safety. Some believed feminism can pressure institutions and society to ensure justice, while others argued that safety depends on law enforcement, self-defense, or societal maturity rather than feminist movements alone. A minority perceived women as already safe, questioning the relevance of feminism.

Culture, Tradition, and Women's Autonomy

Cultural norms emerged as a significant factor shaping attitudes. While many respondents emphasized women's right to make personal choices, others felt strong reactions when cultural boundaries are perceived to be violated. This reflects ongoing negotiations between tradition and individual autonomy. These views are like research that suggested the actual need of redefining traditional norms [4].

Customs and Rituals in Women's Lives

Respondents largely supported women's autonomy in practicing customs and rituals, particularly in the context of busy schedules. However, some emphasized women's responsibility in preserving culture, revealing expectations that cultural continuity is primarily a female obligation.

Rural–Urban Differences in the Need for Feminism

Perceptions of the need for feminism across rural and urban areas varied. Some respondents highlighted lack of awareness and education in rural areas, while others believed both contexts face gender issues, though of different kinds. A few suggested that feminism should focus on issue-specific interventions rather than geographic distinctions.

Perceived Inequality Faced by Men

Finally, respondents expressed differing views on inequality experienced by men. While some acknowledged discrimination against men and suggested the need for corrective measures, most did not support a separate movement, citing male dominance in society. Instead, respondents favored targeted interventions over formal movements [5].

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that men's perspectives on feminism within educational institutes are neither uniformly supportive nor entirely opposed. While many men recognize the importance of gender equality and feminist ideals, their interpretations are shaped by cultural conditioning, personal experiences, and prevailing social narratives. Misconceptions surrounding feminism, particularly regarding its perceived misuse, influence men's attitudes and underscore the need for comprehensive gender-sensitization programs. Educational institutions, as critical sites of socialization, can play a pivotal role in fostering informed, inclusive, and constructive engagement with feminist ideas.

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