



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# What is Male Privilege?

**SHOUNAK REZA**

A little less than two years ago, I was mugged in a Dhaka neighbourhood rather infamous for being infested with muggers, when I was walking home from work around 10 PM. I had never been mugged before and needless to say, I was shaken and dishevelled following the incident. My friends had always asked me to not walk home so late into the evening, but I, having never gotten a taste of what everybody living in Dhaka tends to stay cautious about, had never paid heed to their advice. Now I knew what they meant.

Two days later, I was telling a friend how traumatised the incident had left me. "Now I understand how unsafe this city can be," I told her.

"Well, now you know just a fraction of how women feel out in the streets," she said.

Her words hit me in a way that made me realise just how insensitive my remark was and how, basking in male privilege, men rarely give a thought to how unsafe the world out there is for women, thanks to – among other things – the normalisation of rape culture, the constant fuelling of male privilege and a great dearth of voices seeking to dismantle the patriarchal social structure.

Male privilege refers to the opportunities men get to thrive and stay safe everywhere, be it within their families, in their careers, or in the streets. Knowingly or unknowingly, men enjoy these privileges in every sphere of life. It includes the fact that men can walk down the street without the fear of being sexually harassed or assaulted, that boys are rarely called out for misbehaving because it is easier to say "boy will be boys" instead of confronting age-old practices that have allowed boys to grow up thinking they can get away with anything and everything. The fact that their talents are rarely measured on the basis of how they look and what they wear, that wild insinuations about sexual escapades don't usually fly around when they achieve success in their careers and elsewhere, that they don't have to deal with glass ceilings in their careers, that they are rarely told to treat women with respect when news about a rape circulates (in contrast, women are advised to dress "modestly" and not go out unchaperoned) are all examples of the privileges men have.

On social media and in real life, many men keep saying there is no such things as male privilege, some even going on to say that women have it easier than men in many cases, often referring to (and sometimes singularly focusing on) the concept of keeping reserved seats for women in buses, barely paying attention to the fact that such reservations wouldn't be necessary if men did not harass women and (largely) face no consequences, if women had the same opportunities to thrive as men, if men saw women as their equals and respected them accordingly.

The very fact that it took me almost nineteen years to realise how unsafe it can be to be out alone in the dark proves the existence of male privilege, cocooned in which men rarely get to experience the fear women have to live with on a daily basis. It can't be dismantled overnight, but if nobody addresses it, if its existence is denied, true gender equality can never be established and the world will remain an unsafe place for women.

## THE F WORD

**RASHA JAMEEL**

I no longer ask people if they're feminists.

The responses hardly ever vary. It's always:

I'm not a feminist, I'm a/an \_\_\_\_\_.

a. Humanist

b. Meninist

c. Equalist

d. Pseudofeminist

Feminism is taboo, but the nonsensical alternative terms somehow... aren't.

People attempt to justify their use of these alternative terms by using wishy-washy logic and saying things like "the world has changed" and differentiating gender experiences is "old-fashioned". They also profess their profound love for birds, trees, animals or anything that moves and say they must call themselves a humanist because "feminist" just doesn't cut it.

It seems that in their endeavour to distance themselves from the word "feminism", people often tend to forget how their thoughts on equal rights stand out. The absurdity is a carbuncle.

The stigma surrounding feminism is rooted in misogyny, the unflinching rule of "patriarchal values must not be questioned". No one is exempt from this rule, save for a feminist, whose ideologies shake loose the inequality ingrained into the conservative way of life.

And thus, "meninism" was born, alongside increased usage of words such as "equalism" and "humanism". The point of origin for all the confusion surrounding feminism. Years and years of conservatism had come under threat, but for the right reasons. While the former was acknowledged, the latter was not. The lack of awareness has now led to the feminist movement being mocked through various means, as clichés, a seasonal trend, an outcome of premenstrual syndrome.

Here's a quick rundown on feminism: what is it about really? Feminism is a concept revolving around equal rights for all sexes and genders on the basis of economics, politics, and social issues. Despite the origins of the word, feminism itself doesn't prioritise women, or any one sex or gender

identity. Feminism works in the favour of equality, with further diversified branches, such as intersectional feminism, taking into account factors beyond genders:

class, race, ethnicity, age, colourism, body positivity, religious beliefs, ableism, sexual orientation, et cetera.

It has been argued that perhaps all these layers pertaining to inclusivity has only added to the confusion surrounding feminism which has only continued to grow, to a point where anti-feminists can exploit it however they see fit.

Behold: *pseudofeminism*.

A pseudofeminist will claim to advocate for feminism in public, whilst acting upon anti-feminist ideologies at home. A husband who brags about "allowing" his wife to work post-marriage. A media personality who encourages you to be your best self by using fairness products. A philanthropist who won't offer decent wages to their employees. An individual with double standards is no feminist, and yet continues to parade around as one, for the whole world to see.

Hatred for feminism has gained momentum amongst the working class primarily because of the movement's trivialisation amidst privileged individuals in society, where this same privilege shields these individuals from many of the woes feminism is meant to fight. The false notion of feminism being exclusive has thus become established.

People continue to dismiss feminism as merely being fashionable during the 21st century. One stigma is piled on top of the other as people continue to replace "feminism" with more neutral terms, citing excuses of exclusivity and disrespect. But it is more evident now than ever, the stigma associated with feminism is a direct product of patriarchal insecurities: what if we do to them what they've been doing to us for centuries?

*The author has currently locked horns with her greatest foe: the microbial gut flora. Lend her a hand in battling the devious proteobacteria phyla at [rasha.jameel@outlook.com](mailto:rasha.jameel@outlook.com)*

