With the discourse on feminism expanding to include newer gender roles, equal employment benefits, modern icons, and humanism, Bazaar gets writers, artists, and designers to weigh in.
I don’t understand why a woman would shy away from the idea of being a feminist—
It’s not a bad word. It doesn’t make you less nuanced—
you can be single, married, a mother,
a professional, traditional, rebellious, butch, femme—anything.
You reclaim your rights, not only as a woman—but as a human.
You fight the idea that there’s only one type of feminism.
There are no instructions for being the ‘right kind’
because each person’s journey is personal.

Pia Alizé Hazarika is a Delhi-based illustrator and graphic designer with a background in product design and fine arts.
The New \textit{Feminism}

\textbf{KAVERSEE BAMZAI}

\textit{ON HOW MENINISM SHOULD BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE NEW FEMINISM}

The other day, lawyer and author Amy Chua drew up a contract for her grown up daughters, specifying the conditions under which they could use the New York apartment she and her husband had made for themselves. I approve. Could we also draw up a contract for the boys we raise and how they should behave with us and other women? Every day women are given advice. Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg tells us to lean in. The lawyer and political scientist Anne-Marie Slaughter tells us to lean back and let the husband become lead parent on occasion. Pepsi's Indra Nooyi tells us to tell us however much we achieve, we will always live with the guilt of being a bad mother.

Let's have some words of advice for our boys as well. Since we don't have Mother India's partnership, not a battle zone. That a gender war will benefit no one. That we need to start educating men now if they are indeed to keep pace with women.

\textbf{TISHANI DOSHI}

\textit{ON WHY FEMINISM IS ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE}

We live in confusing times. It used to be that the word feminism bristled with meaning. It stood like a messiah on a mountaintop. It revolved in the streets with placards, polarising the hell out of people. It was a world of the Fabindia-clad and Spanx-clad and never the twain could meet. Now feminism has flourished into equivanimity, into the road of white noise.

So you can post photographs of your tits on Instagram because you're in charge of your erotic capital, and this is a version of female empowerment. Or you could be a girl who was shot in the head by a brute while going to school, who lives to tell the tale and becomes an icon—and this is also a version of female empowerment. And even as the gamut of feminism has been extended to accommodate a berth so wide so as not to exclude anyone, even as we've made the notion of feminism so palatable so no one could really object to the word feminist because it simply means equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and who could be opposed to that? Even then, you do a straw poll. You ask around, and people say, I'm for equality, but I'm not a feminist.

Because something about the word still reeks of aggressiveness and arrmit hair. I understand. There's a too-muchness to it. It asserts, it challenges, it means to rock the boat. And perhaps you don't want to be militant. You don't want to come off as shrill. You're happy to be part of the revolution as it is, and life has turned out okay for you, so why complain? But feminism isn't about hating men or rejecting feminin qualities. It has nothing to do with who opens the door for whom. It isn't even about you. You are just the starting point of your own story.

Feminism is about the collective. It's about challenging centuries of patriarchy, of asking how it is possible that in this country of profound mother worship we have lost 100 million girls. How is it that every 20 minutes in this country, a woman is raped, that women still don't have control over their reproductive rights, and girls are found naked in ditches and wells—defaced, damaged, dead. And we are meant to absorb all this news, and say what? I'm not a feminist.

I hear all kinds of words being tossed around—survival feminism, marketplace feminism, full frontal feminism, intersectional feminism, white feminism, radical feminism, pseudo feminism—and it all goes whoosh over my head because I don't understand how a basic idea can be made so complex.

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So let's not be coy about it. It's about survival. About channelling whatever kind of feminism is meant to absorb all, this news, and say what? I'm not a feminist.

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I caught these terribly graceful, young school girls on their way home through the Chashme Shahi Garden in Srinagar, Kashmir. I can’t imagine the world they’ve grown up in, full of daily disruption, curfews, blackouts, agitation, and other adversities that prevent regular education. It reminded me that in so many places in the world, for a woman to attend school is an act of rebellion. What made the moment more poignant was that this was on a trip I had taken with my half-Kashmiri friend, screenwriter Neha Kaul Mehra. It was just us, two girls, exploring Kashmir on our own. Everyone told us we were crazy, but, sometimes, an act of rebellion goes a long way.

Karuna Ezara Parikh is a television anchor and writer. You can read her writing at inkimageideology.blogspot.com and view her poems at instagram.com/karunaezara.
The problem with feminism is that more people don’t self-identify with it.

Let’s start with the women. Too many women who should know better have a problem with the word itself. A touch of unattractiveness, a smear of prudery, a garnish of ‘what will people think’, all adding up to a problem of perception.

More intelligent women may argue over definitions. There is, of course, more value in a debate that includes a historical awareness of where the feminist movement has come from and the markers along that journey. As with any politically charged movement that has fed on the philosophies of deeply committed thinkers, there will be stuff you agree with and stuff that makes you turn away.

That the conversation is fractious may intimidate, but it shouldn’t stop you from being involved in the conversation itself; indeed, it shouldn’t make you turn away from it. And yet, so many women I meet preface any utterance about gender issues with that deeply disturbing, “I’m no feminist but...”. Why equivocate and qualify?

What is so wrong with wanting what’s due to you as a human being?

If you think that you’re already there, that being a woman has absolutely no effect on your future choices—whether educational, employment-wise, sexual, or whatever—then you’re both impossibly privileged and impossibly un-self-aware about it. If you have access to an indoor loo, can go to a place of worship without being turned away about your cycle, and can afford transport that separates you from the road and its hazards, then you’re already where millions of women in this country can only dream of being. Own that privilege, give humble thanks for it, and know that you’re implicated in it being denied to your sisters when you think it isn’t an issue anymore because you are already there. As for the men, feminism is always going to be a hard sell. It’s abundantly clear that we Indians don’t do self-recognition. The tone-deaf comedy of our movies, the insensitivity of our political leaders and cinema icons, the violence of our everyday language, and the complete ubiquity now of uncensored internet trolls, are all testament to our failings as a civilisation. The other great ruptures that our country is facing—the continuing indignities of the caste system, the majoritarianism that is aggressively asserting itself, the war over what constitutes Indian culture—are of a piece with this.

The most pernicious thing to happen to middle-class India is the argument that some of these battles aren’t for ‘us’, because ‘our culture’ isn’t like that. Take caste: It is embedded in us, the argument goes, and anyway it was never as bad as all those dumb Western— and Western-educated Indian—thinkers made out. That women should know their place follows from this. But the next time one of these experts in Indian culture speaks up in your presence, point him—and the occasional po-faced her—in the direction of the Constitution of India. What that eloquent document states is what should be self-apparent—that every single person born on this earth is due certain rights. Any culture that seeks to argue against that is just imitating a genre—the continuing indignities of the caste system, the majoritarianism that is aggressively asserting itself, the war over what constitutes Indian culture—are of a piece with this.

So start self-identifying as a feminist. There’s a long battle coming, and every single one of us, man or woman, is going to have to work out where we stand.△
When I started my project about the Ramayana, I was particularly interested in Sita’s character. I soon discovered during my travels, for instance in the city of Madhubani in Bihar, that women still have a strong relationship with her. She is not seen as an obedient princess who blindly follows her husband. She is a strong and independent woman who decides to reject Ram when he begs for forgiveness at the end of the story.

As Indian women, we are always aware of the offensive, sexualised male gaze; out on the streets, we do everything we can to avoid it. We don’t let our hair down and mingle. Which is why this image of my friend, musician Sneha Khanwalkar, is an important one for me. She is cutting loose and dancing on the streets with a bunch of men leading a procession. It was a spontaneous, liberating moment and it was such a fun visual that I had to capture it. It is an image that spells freedom, and how the dynamic should be between men and women on the streets but rarely ever is.

Aparna Jayakumar is a photographer from Mumbai now based in Doha. Her work has been featured in several publications and she has shot campaigns for leading brands. Aparna founded the Bombay Photo Club and also teaches photography.

VASANTHA YOGANANTHAN
ON SITA BEING AN EARLY FEMINIST ICON

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Vasantha Yogananthan is the recipient of the IdeasTap/Magnum Photos Award (category international) for his ongoing A Myth of Two Souls, a seven-book project. He considers the photobook to be his primary medium for research into original narrative approaches.

APARNA JAYAKUMAR
ON ONE LIBERATING MOMENT

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The New FEMINISM

Like a river with many bends, the idea of feminism has changed course, depth, and width, but flown relentlessly forward. If the early 20th century saw feminism as the freedom to vote, and later to dress as one pleased, the latter half was about women coming out of their homes, and taking the education and jobs that they wanted. In the 21st century, much of the thought on feminism is about equality with men, of women ‘breaking the glass ceiling’ to do everything that men do, and enjoying the freedom accorded to them. Sheryl Sandberg’s Lean In theorised this thinking of modern feminism.

So what is new feminism and how is it different from modern feminism? By definition, new feminism means women don’t have to do all that men do, but that there is a ‘complementarity’ in what they can do. Let’s face it. Despite the progress of all kinds of technology, men aren’t going to bear children in the foreseeable future. That doesn’t make them lesser parents, but different ones. New feminism explores how best men and women can work together, not just to raise children but to strengthen each other and their respective careers.

I come from a second generation of working women: My mother and all my aunts were women with professional careers, married to men who supported them while holding down careers. Given all the help that parents, aunts, and uncles give you in India, I did all that I wished to, when I wished to, and don’t regret it. What’s new is that there is a ‘complementarity’ in what they can do. Let’s face it. Global CEOs, world leaders, women at the top of practically every profession. I am speaking, of course, of a privileged, urban reality, but change is apparent across the globe.

So what is new feminism and how is it different from modern feminism? The way I see it, there is no new and old feminism. There is only feminism, which is a basic call for equality and dignity. The only thing new about a discourse as old as humanity is shame. It’s certainly new to see among ourselves women making feminist choices and leading feminist lifestyles who aren’t comfortable owning up to the word. To find the feminist heroes of today’s India, then, you’ll have to leave your cosmopolitan bubble and talk to ordinary women for whom equality is a daily fight and feminism, a badge of honour.

For me, it’s the female fitness instructor in a gym in Ranchi, a skinny free-fit girl you’ll find hard to spot in the crowd of Salman Khan lookalikes, but who will tell you, as she makes you kick harder and harder at your sweating self in the mirror, that there is no one—man or woman—that she couldn’t flatter in a boxing ring.

It’s also the female police officer in Simdega, Jharkhand, who rides a motorbike twice as fast as any male colleague and maintains the fattest bundle of latex in the district’s police force to convince her superiors that she is capable of more than just dealing with the affairs of the local women’s cell.

Take the women of Khadar Lahervija, a collective of journalists from under-represented communities—Muslims, Christians, Dalits—in regional media, who traverse the bleakest parts of Uttar Pradesh on their bicycles, often at the cost of personal safety, to wring out news that would never otherwise cross the boundary of a village, from leaks in public distribution to missing teenage Dalit girls.

My feminist icon of the year also happens to be from Uttar Pradesh. In September 2015, 27-year-old Richa Singh, daughter of a retired junior engineer in Allahabad, decided to contest the election for the post of the president of the student’s union of Allahabad University. There is a reason no woman had ever set her sights on the position in the university’s 128 years of existence. To campaign for a post—any post—in the student’s union, you need a large amount of money; bags and bags of currency thrown in as propaganda by the parent party. You also need ‘muck’—SUNs, bouncers, guns. All Richa Singh, an independent candidate, had was anger at being constantly reminded of the things young women weren’t allowed to do as part of the university’s—and the city’s—system. Singh also had, crucially, the ability to leap to any surface high twice as fast as any male colleague and maintains the fattest bundle of latex in the district’s police force to convince her superiors that she is capable of more than just dealing with the affairs of the local women’s cell.

After a month-long election campaign through which she faced all stages of resistance—discouragement from family and friends, concern from university authorities, caution from every political stakeholder in the city, and violent threats from male rivals and their supporters—Singh headed towards the historic building housing the offices of the student’s union on the shoulders of female students. She’d won the election by 11 votes. It was the first time the university’s young women had entered the premises of the student’s union building. Singh’s victory has led to many ‘firsts’ for young women all over Allahabad ever since, from riding their scooters without fear to taking out protest rallies through the streets. Old or new, that’s a feminism worth cheering for. 

Suhasini Haidar is the diplomatic editor of The Hindu, and was previously the foreign affairs editor and a prime-time anchor for the English news channel CNN-IBN.

Snigdha Poonam is a journalist based in Delhi. She has written for several publications, including The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Guardian, and Granta.
Feminism is home. In the body and everything that responds to this body. And your body. Our bodies. Feminism is plural. We are so many. Our feminist journeys vary and connect us too, informing the ‘Action Hero’ collective.

Feminism stirs the protest to desire. To question what we deny ourselves, because we have been taught to. Many Action Heroes around the world are sleeping in public parks. In sleep we protest for the right to be unwarned, and defenceless, in our very own spaces, all spaces—parks, buses, trains, at home, and on street. Action Heroes meet to sleep, confronting fear, questioning warnings, rejecting every long, short, twisted excuse for violence—“be careful” or “I told you so”.

Feminism is basic, fundamental, simple, even ‘logical’. Nothing justifies sexual violence. There are no excuses. No woman ever asks for it.

Ten years ago, Indri, my grandma, said she wanted to be an actor. This led to an ongoing collaboration between us, where we dream up characters she desires to be. She acts and I photograph her. Feminism, to me, is the right to dream, desire, and become. To ask, “What if?” and “Why not?” To fearlessly imagine the world we want and step into it.

Jasmeen Patheja is the founder director of Blank Noise, a community of ‘Action Heroes’ united to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence. She is an artist with a focus on community arts and photography.

Joey Foster Ellis is a sculptor, conservator, and stop-motion animator based in New York. His work has been exhibited extensively worldwide, and can be found in the private collections of Hillary Clinton and George W Bush.
It’s not just the physical space. It’s not just the conquest of pavements and parks and plazas. It’s not just the punch lines and slaps that fly through the air. It’s not just the reverberations of threats and taunts that can shrink the world to a size of a fist. It’s not just the manspreading on public transport, the size 11 shoes and the muckkack swung round with a casual disregard. It’s not just the housework undone, the childcare neglected, the chaos and sprawl left in the wake of someone who considers his time more significant. It’s not just the seat on an all-male panel, comfortably settled into, as the cushion gives a quiet sigh. It’s not just the pronouncements, settlements, verdicts—all solid as stone.

It’s also a sort of psychic space. Men are left in the wake of someone who considers his time more significant. It’s not just the seat on an all-male panel, comfortably settled into, as the cushion gives a quiet sigh. It’s not just the explaining and the hectoring that drones on there even when we’re not. We’re not there. The cushion gives a quiet sigh. It’s not just the pronouncements, settlements, verdicts—all solid as stone.

So, gents, chaps, bros, dudes, geezers, buddies, fellows, blokes, lads, mates, pals: Pipe down a bit, won’t you? Cede some space. Stride less, shout less, tweet less, punches and slaps that fly through the air. It’s not just the manspreading on public transport, the size 11 shoes and the muckkack swung round with a casual disregard. It’s not just the housework undone, the childcare neglected, the chaos and sprawl left in the wake of someone who considers his time more significant. It’s not just the seat on an all-male panel, comfortably settled into, as the cushion gives a quiet sigh. It’s not just the pronouncements, settlements, verdicts—all solid as stone.

Over there we stand as history and over here we loom inflating into polemics, of an unstoppable self-indulgent stare. 'We’re feminists and certainly better at it than each other, and certainly better at it than women, because we’re better at everything.’ A few years ago in a bookshop, I happened to see a striking copy of The Europeans by Henry James. The cover image was an early 20th-century painting, Patience, by the British artist Leonard Campbell Taylor. In the foreground, a woman in a white dress sits in front of a card table, her expression determined, knowing, focused on the card strews on the green baize. Her mien and posture indicate a supreme sense of strategy. Behind her, hands resting on the back of her chair, a man looks on. There is a stillness about him, his attention entirely directed towards her actions. For all we know he could be a complete cad, planning some dastardly adventure, but it looks as though his mission is to learn from her, absorb what he can from what she says and does. It is an intense engagement with her experience.

As I walked up the corridor, my heart was pumping with unknown fear. I had been called to the director’s office. The director of the National Police Academy is a DG rank officer, who is much senior than a probationer with a single star on her shoulder. With all the courage that I could muster, I entered into his room and sat down with poise. He questioned me about my background, social and educational, and then about my performance as an officer trainee. Then, out of nowhere, I was asked about my intentions for my then best friend, now husband. I was asked if I intended to marry him or if I was just having fun. Did I realise that these were very important days of my life that I was wasting on someone? What would my parents say if they got to know that I was roaming around the campus with this boy? I realised he was shaking with unspent rage.

I wanted to say it’s none of your business Mr Director. But instead I told him that my parents were aware of our relationship and that we were pretty serious about each other. That didn’t satisfy him. He told me to pay attention to my training and leave the matchmaking to my parents. I was then dismissed. Shocked and astounded, I waited for my best friend to be called to the director’s office. But that day never came. Nobody questioned his motives for hanging around with me. That was my first brush with the patriarchal nature of the government, barely half a decade ago.

Over the years spent on duty, I have realised that this patriarchy is deeply entrenched in the system. It’s in something as small as when a group of police officers are standing together, the public addresses only the male officers, even when they are junior to the lady officer. And though the government has made it compulsory that 33 percent women be hired in the police force, the wherewithal required to facilitate this is lacking. For example, restrooms for women—while on long bandobast duties, women face the big problem of relieving themselves. The uniformed forces are so used to men as subordinates that while then’s a urinal on every floor, a restroom for ladies is considered a welfare measure. Even as campaigns like ‘No Shame in Menstruating’, and photo series on Instagram that assert a women’s right to bleed bring these issues to the fore, women in the police dread those days—in my last arrangement, I had to take transaxilid tablets to make sure I didn’t stain my uniform.

Similarly, motherhood, feeding rooms, and criches are an alien concept for the forces. Bear kids is looked upon as a social necessity, but the sole onus of bringing up babies is put on the mother. Three years ago, while I was empathised with and counselled on multiple occasions to think about the six-month-old baby I was leaving at home, my husband was expected to work very hard, forget about his family (or any other responsibility), and focus on work. There aren’t even eight-hour shifts for new mothers.

All this sounds and feels dismal. However, my interactions with women, who are my service seniors, have helped me see the larger picture. These are all women who are pioneers in their own ways. Most of them have raised children against all odds and excelled at their careers.

When Archana Ramasundaram took the charge of DG BSF, one more glass ceiling was shattered—she became the first woman DG of a paramilitary force. Gone are those days when women were told to work 200 percent more if they wanted to be accepted as an equal. If this is not new feminism, what is? Riding this wave, many of us want to be accepted as equals, even with our differences with men. Especially in the forces, women bring an emotional quotient to the service. They need to be nurtured, and any regressive attitude needs to be dealt with. As more and more women become self-sufficient, freedom, equality, and independence, the three tenets of feminism, become a reality for them. Till we ensure that, we are failing one half of humanity.

Esha Pandey is a police officer currently serving in Delhi, and the author of I Will Meet You There.
EINA AHLUWALIA
ON MAKING A STATEMENT WITH HER FEMINIST DESIGNS

These are two brooches shaped like medals, or badges of honour, but with words—‘potential rapist’ and ‘meat’—that redefine gender in India. The former is a badge that is invisibly worn by every man in the country, because anyone of them could be the predator, whereas every Indian woman is just flesh or meat. The ‘potential rapist’ badge is a question aimed at every Indian man. With the horrific violations that are happening against women in India, every man, even the good ones, in a lonely alley would be viewed as a potential rapist. Are they going to stand up for themselves? Instead of being silent spectators, are they going to actually do something to stop these heinous crimes, to intervene, to prove they are not all potential rapists?

The ‘meat’ badge is a sad statement about what we Indian women are reduced to against our will. On one hand our generation of women has education, jobs, economic independence. We travel for work and pleasure, we create teams at work and families at home. We build, grow, and want to influence the world and touch the skies. On the other hand, many men view us as flesh and meat. To be sampled when they have the urge, or just because we dare to be out in the open, living our lives instead of being their slaves at home.

Meat, not just to be gang-raped (which seems to be the new team sport for Indian men), but to be disemboweled, sodomised with iron rods, and hung to die on trees. Forget having a gender, we are not even human. We are just meat.

Eina Ahluwalia is a jewellery designer whose work revolves around feminism and spirituality. She trained under pioneering conceptual jeweller Ruudt Peters, and her designs have been featured extensively in international publications.

MITHU SEN
ON HER FEMINIST OEUVRE

My metaphorical take on new feminism is applied playfully on different aspects of everyday life. One of them is my new way of meaning-making through non-language as a form of resistance against all marginalised areas. I try to critique those marginalised areas where subtle hierarchical codes and hegemony (sexual, political, regional, emotional, or lingual) is imposed in the society.

One of such interactive/site-specific recent performance projects was Mis(s)Guide held at PEM, Peabody Essex Museum, USA, in February this year.

It aimed at taking visitors to an alternative and participatory tour of the museum. I tried to play a new narrative of engagement by creating non-museum but equally important and valuable personal stories and information of the objects that I displayed at different corners. Confronting the visitors by raising questions against their own prejudices, I tried to draw attention towards the subtle hierarchical canons and hegemony of the institutions often masquerading as the norm. I identified this new method of meaning-making as part of my feminist approach, wherein I created a new language of communication, breaking along with it the barriers of what's permitted in public as well as private space.

Mithu Sen is the recipient of the Skoda Award (2010) and Prudential Eye Award (2015). Her practice stems from a conceptual and interactive drawing and poetry background that has extended into video, sculpture, installation, sound, and performance.
Write us a piece on men and feminism, said the Editor.

In other words, walk across that minefield, with nothing at all to protect you.

What can one say about ‘feminists’ that has not been said before, and that too in just 400 words?

Editors are like that, but they have to be obeyed.

So what I will do is to air a pet theory of mine, one that I have spent a decade or more evolving but which has absolutely no scientific evidence to back it up. After years of observation, I have come to believe that Indian men are not feminists. They are not even close to being one. They may think they are and the more liberal and open-minded among them may protest they believe in feminist ideals and women’s equality, but that’s all self-delusion. I have yet to come across a single fully formed feminist man.

Part of it may well have to do with genetic formation. Can any man really know what it means to be a woman? Forget biological functions, even a simple act of walking on the street in even the biggest Indian city is a different experience for the sexes. In any really civilized country, this should be something that we should take for granted, but in India, being out in public, even during the day, is hazardous for women. For this, men should take the blame.

Move from there to the workplace. The number of women working in offices has grown exponentially. In my own profession, journalism, I have been witness to increasing number of young women joining the newsroom. At one time—in the Jurassic era—they used to be asked to cover ‘soft’ stories, like fashion, films, or features. Today, that kind of patronising attitude will get a sharp response. But somehow, very few women make it to the top—partly because it is easier for us to move through public space, to study, to work, to love (and fall out of love), and to aspire than it is for our female peers. This is true both in the West and in India. Such discrepancies won’t simply be addressed with quotas or other regulations. It’s incumbent upon men to behave thoughtfully in all professional and social spaces—no matter how small—knowing that we are the inheritors of millennia of advantage and power.

That may sound like insurmountable baggage, but it doesn’t have to be. It’s not that hard to treat people with decency and respect. And I don’t see what’s so controversial about a position like this: The recognition that our societies are still marked by pernicious forms of inequality that will take time to eradicate.

But even here, in my relatively sheltered, progressive bubble in New York City, it can be difficult to escape the wider anti-feminist American conversation.

I’ve been surprised and angered in recent years to hear the frequency with which ‘feminism’ is maligned in public discourse here. Many people—including many women—speak of feminism as if it were an outrageous cult bent on traducing men, rather than what it actually is: A set of principles that have pushed societies around the world towards greater equity and fairness.

I’m happy to call myself a feminist. In my circumstances, I don’t think it is so hard to treat people with decency and respect. And I don’t see what’s so controversial about a position like this: The recognition that our societies are still marked by sadism and perversion in certain corners. But I do get the reactions—right-thinking people should consider themselves feminists, but even that is not enough.

To be a feminist one simply needs to accept the truth that there is such a thing as patriarchy (which can be at once nebulous and terribly concrete) and that, along with other social structures like class, caste (in India), and race (in the West), we should do what we can in ways small and large to resist it. A society shouldn’t be judged on its wealth or power, but rather on how equally all its members can participate in and reap the rewards of its public life.

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For some time now, I have been drawing images of women—women together, reading, walking, sitting sideways, talking in gardens they’ve grown; I am testing silhouettes and working to imagine personal style and fashion outside of patriarchy and its gaze. (Maybe only a future generation can truly do that?) But by making such women visible, I am giving myself the images I wish I had grown up with, so that I wouldn’t have to unlearn so much when it came to my own body.

I’m trying hard to make images that are gaze-aware, images that are not fighting against it, but using it to cleave open an aesthetic I/we are scared of, uncertain of.

With drawing, and more so with video and performance, I have a magical control over space and what is possible in that frame, and unlike the life I live outside a studio, I am able to decide exactly how I want to be seen and how much. Or how I will look when I dance—I can edit everything, play a game with the gaze, when I’m on your feed, it’s on my own terms. The frame is a (beautiful) safe space; sometimes, when I’m fully immersed, it does the legwork for me, introduces me, makes very clear and visible the parts of me that have caused the greatest trouble in how I feel in this world. Simple things like the state of hair on my body or when my lover first sees it, and then bigger things like how I want to be treated, what my opinions are, what makes me swoon.

It’s like when people know I eat fish because of my last name, but in a way that’s so much better. Right now it’s a strong, but soft, approach to taking control and guiding perceptions of myself, and imagining utopias—feminist and ecological—that use the very raw material that our current society is built on. We have everything we need!

Pallavi Sen is an artist who shares her work on @superfeministgirl.