

**Book Review**  
**Seeing like a Feminist**

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In this book the author tried to understand the Feminist dialogue, which had been made by Nivedita Menon in her book “Seeing like a Feminist”. Niveditamemon, a feminist writer and she is Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. She has written number of book on Feminism and politics. In this book she had put light on the issues and challenges faced by a women’s in the country like India. The author, divides the book into six main chapters that take on most of the issues in India: Family, Body, Desire, Sexual Violence, Feminists and Women, Victims or Agents. Each chapter is an allusion to patriarchy’s, subjugation of women, power dynamics in the family and society and different role of these disadvantages on women’s lives in India, A noteworthy feature of this book by Menon, that she cites numerous cases, their

explanations and narratives while explaining each concept, to provide for a contextual and in-depth background of the issues. Each chapter is pierced with examples of social realities from around the country to give us a comprehensive picture of what it truly means to be feminist and broader understanding of feminism.

She initiated her writing by compares the concept of nude makeup with the maintenance of social order. She argues, in a world where everyone is marketing their talents like intellect or physical labor in order to make a living, this kind of critique has lost its edge. She stated the story of the young girl Moni who become the victim of this natural order of the society. Money was beaten, tourchered, and stripped naked just because she is behaving like boy. By this, Menon question the society about their

gendered - appropriate behavior which socially a socially construct product. She further quoted the "family as an institution" by mentions that families a legal intuition with the specific set of people with special way, which can only a heterosexual , patriarchal and legally and socially accepted with a men, women and " his" children. She quotes a scene from the movie Mrityudand "Ye kiska bachha hai?" (Whose child is this?) – This question is mostly put to unmarried or widowed pregnant women. To be sure, the baby is inside her body it is hers. But in reality, the question literally means – "Who is the father of the child?" – Completely avoiding the evident mother. This is because it creates a concern about the claim to property rights and related complications. She added that no men can claim the child in the women womb is his, only the women knows the child her womb

The division of the labor is in the way that women is responsible for the housework and reproduction. And it is totally an unpaid work but if this work is extend in the public arena that this consider as the paid work, e.g., cooking is consider as women work but there are very few chef are women. Women consider as weak sex but they are the one who do majority of the heavy work like carrying heavy loads of water and firewood's, planting paddy, construction work and so on and all of these are consider as unpaid work. She further

argued that even the surname of the women is not her. . Such is the irony of patriarchy that women also need at attach the surname either of this father or husband. Dowry, which is earlier especially practice in north part of the India by the upper Hindu caste but slowly and gradually it covers all the country. It is a social evil which is prohibited in India since 1984 but the mechanism they prohibited this change is in effective because it come to play only if the complaint is lodged. Menon marks a challenge to patrilineal society in new reproductive technologies now a woman can become pregnant through donor sperm. The different women perform different roles like one can give birth the child and the other can bring up the child "Social Mother"

Menon, further stated that the gender roles, stereotyping and roles are not only Indian phenomenon it's universal and it is deep rooted in all kind of the society's in the world. The women's subordination is be justified by the only on the ground of the biological difference between the men and women. The qualities of the individual is also sex specific like men should be brave and confident and the women should be sensitive and shy. If the men cry then is relate to women "why are you crying like a women"? The statement by Simone de Beauvoir "“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” which means we learn how to become men or women. We built our

self by those roles, responsibilities, resources, values and rules which the society has already given to us. Many times many bodies cannot fit in these socially designed order and that one consider as abnormal or illegal. In case of intersex the doctor have right to assign the gender of the child and that time he doctor have to see the social factors in the community and the desire of the parent and most of the times the desired child of the parents is “Boy”, that influence the doctor to assign the sexual identity of the child. There is no mechanism or other thing where the individual can choose one’s own gender. Mensuration, which is instable feature associated with female bodies. It is consider to stigmatize in our society. This stigma is meant because of the traditional beliefs in impurity of menstruating women and on one is willing to discuss it. She questioned that “what did the men could menstruate?” Then there is high chances that the society will celebrate this as a masculine event. The men get more care and there were parties were thrown in these days. This could be the proof of manhood and the sanitary napkins are funded and available openly everywhere.

As per section 377 any unnatural sex activity is penalized. The upbringing of the individual through the family, media, and other institution create the negative and false socialization related to which is natural and unnatural behavior. Still homosexual

behavior consider as the abnormal behavior and many times it is associated with disease or mental illness. But we also keep in mind that this behavior is not criminalized or negative in the ancient Indian societies but this all consider abnormal and unnatural after the British colonial introduced legal provisions. The heteronormativity is always consider as natural and normal. 2009, judgment by the Delhi court excludes consensual sex among adults. In with the individual attain the voting age can do sexual intercourse with mutual consent.

Even the opinion toward the rape is different, patriarchal opinion toward the rape is, it is the crime against honor of the family, it is more worst then the death of the women and there are no normal life possible for rape victim whereas the feminist opinion toward the rape is, it is the crime against the autonomy, bodily integrity of women. This difference of the opinion toward the rape leads two different dimension to fight against this crime. The laws against the rape is inadequate and old. This need to be revised as soon as possible. We have a very narrow view toward the rape. And the section under IPC and the law should be gender neutral so that the men and Hijra too taken account. The well-known case of Banwari Devi who was rape by so called upper caste men as punishment that she tried to stop the child marriage which is against the law is still pending in the court but the

positive fact is that due to this case we have now a law on sexual harassment called “The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The universities following the guidelines by the Supreme Court called as “Vishakha Guidelines” but the main issue is that the definition of Sexual Harassment would be different in academic environment and other kind of workplaces. The interaction between the individuals in both of the environment is totally different. The university is cannot taking this issue seriously. The power dynamics in the committee and the relation and the control of the various things like attendance, Grades can have larger impact on the complaint lodge by the victim. The other issue is the false complaints. Many times due to some person revenge many people lodges false complaints and misuse the power of law.

The feminist response in 2009 to the right wing leader Sri Ram Sene. Who physical attach on women in pub in the city of Mangalore called as “Pink Chaddis Campaign”. This campaign got the wave as the national wide protest by both offline and online. Delhi journalist, Nisha Susan, launched a Facebook group named “Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women” which called women to send pink chaddis to Sri Ram Sene as a gift on Valentine’s Day as anon violence protest over the accident took place in the pub. Sri

Ram Sena office received over 2000 chaddis (Underwear).

Menon viewed that the feminism in not all about man and women, it is more about how gender is complicated by the caste, politics and class. In all the personals laws on marriage and inheritance the women in most of the times were discriminated on one form or other. India cannot b gender neutral until the many of the discriminatory laws were existing. In India all the communities were different from each other. The practices of religion widely different from other and it also depend upon the region to region and sect to sect. there are chances that the practice is better than other for women but if we talk but make all these uniform, that’s not the solution. The bill called” The women’s Representation Bill (WRB) that was proposed to reserve 33 percent of the seats for the women in the parliament but it was still pending. The one of the leader of Janta Dal (United) Party, Sharad Yadav once claimed that the women with short hard can over run the parliament. The image of the short hair women commonly understood or stereotyped by the westernized or elite women. The panchayati raj institution in 1992, give 33 percent reservation to women’s shows some positive result to empower the women but in this high caste women were dominate In one or other way. Government also introduce the quote within quota system.

One cannot resolve any conflict if the inequalities in the society cannot be cured. The conflict cannot resolve in one way “if one party is very powerful then the other is completely powerless”. Women can play different role in different way. Women always want peace. In many places like Kashmir, northeast where women were protesting and come forward as their male relatives, husband and children were disappeared. Women always subject to dominant by upper class, by religion, but law, by family and other institution.

The common ground of all the feminist people is the oppression of the women on any ground. The power relation in the family is the first and primary source to encourage the oppression which is mostly faced by the women. The one of the main question arise the freedom to choose or freedom on one’s life. There are invisible boundaries when one make choices and also put question on the freedom on choice of the individual. Commodification of the female body is the one of the major concern and critique that feminist were arguing since long. The female body mostly shows in the movies or advisement as a luxury system to attract male customers or viewers. Under the capitalism the exploitation of the women is increasing in one or other form. The in patriarchal society the sex work is always seen as the fate which is worse than death. The one of the major cause is poverty and

the education conditions of the women’s which encourage the women into labor market.

### **Reverence of the author**

Gender is a social construct, division of labor and the role of different sexes play a significant role in this context and is strongly seen by the fact that men usually assign the role as the bread earner and females as the care taker for family and children. India is a country with complex cultural, religious, and lingual diversity than any other country in the world. The issues and evils in societies is not new and have long history. Historically, man subjugated the women in all the possible fields. The process of gendering (Gender Socialization), in which people are produced or thought to behave as men and women, is done through different forms of rules and regulations which is totally based on socially construct ideas – some of which are adopted and some which have to be viciously enforced. Women always treated as weak and subordinate to men where he has the privilege and dominant toward the women. If I talk about the evil of dowry system in our country. Even we have the proper legislation against such evil system where it is clearly mentioned that giving and taking of dowry in any form is restricted but it is still prevalent in the society. Women are facing the extreme

level of domestic violence because of this only.

At present, millions of women are engaged in the diverse employment like agriculture, industry and services. Women work in both organized and unorganized sectors of Indian economy. In organized sector there have some kind of, legal protection to safeguard their rights and interests, however those working in unorganized sectors were experienced to a number of problems related to their working conditions, harassment, violence and so on. This book critical pointed out the various things where women are at the forefront of both public and private spheres, but continue to be controlled by institutionalized patriarchies. This is one of good book for a reader who want to gain an extensive knowledge of the history of feminism in India – the history which is conveniently erased from our books, and the cultural narrative. Menon’s work is combination of various facts, as it attempts to disassemble structures, patriarchal and rigid ideologies, hierarchies, rules and social orders. She point the things with the prism of feminism. A noteworthy feature of this book by Menon, that she cites numerous cases, their explanations and narratives while explaining each concept, to provide for a contextual and in-depth background of the issues. Each chapter is pierced with examples of social realities from around the

country to give us a comprehensive picture of what it truly means to be feminist and broader understanding of feminism. In short, it seems, the house of feminist discourse is inherently willing to constantly being subjected to repair and redo. She ended with the beautiful note.

*“It comes slowly, slowly, feminist does. But it just keeps on coming!”*

**Reference :**

Menon, N. (2012). Seeing like a feminist. Penguin UK.