

WHY WE NEED MEENA AGAIN

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In the past couple of years, the world has taken a huge paradigm shift. Through globalisation and changing mindsets, a lot is being spoken about today that was considered taboo even a decade ago. Be it feminism, menstrual hygiene, mental health, environmentalism, body positivity or even the drawbacks of the education system.

Celebrities like Amal Clooney and Emma Watson are being idolised as contemporary feminist icons due to the sheer brevity and wisdom they've spread around the world regarding equality and the relentless efforts they have been making to make the world a better place.

A few weeks ago, I came across Meena cartoon on YouTube and immediately got hooked as I did the first time. After re-watching a few episodes, I realised that all the blazing discussions that take place all over the world was, in fact, discussed in the context of South Asian culture much earlier through Meena.

Since its inception about 27 years ago, the cartoon has achieved a cult status. But what made Meena so popular? What was it about her that appealed so much to people that she still continues to rule hearts across nations? Well, let's take a flashback.

The 90s were simpler times. Even though it was a defining decade in so many ways, there were eerie, deep-rooted prejudices that took place in society, especially against women, children, and minorities. There was a general lack of awareness about social discrimination. Not just in villages but also in the cities.

In the meantime, a new age phenomenon rose. Meena! A young, optimistic and inspirational girl that



decided to take charge and defy norms. At a time, when social issues were hardly thought of, let alone addressed. Back when marriage was touted as a girl's only ambition, Meena dared to disagree!

Meena with her brother Raju and pet parrot Mithu set out to oppose the extreme discrimination South Asian girls faced back then. She addressed serious issues such as gender inequality, education, early marriage, sanitation, hygiene and so on.

"Count Your Chickens", the first episode of Meena Cartoon was a sensational hit among the youth and still continues to be a firm favourite among the masses. Through a simple times-table and missing chickens, Meena established that education is a basic human right. The episode highlighted how even the slightest amount of knowledge can help solve the biggest of problems.

Her visit to Dhaka to see her aunt and getting mistook as a servant girl boldly addressed the issue and repercussions of child labour. Remember how Princess Diana was lauded as a humanitarian for making the world pay attention to causes that actually needed it? Especially, HIV/AIDS?

Well, Meena wasn't too far behind either. She reached out to solve the stigma revolving HIV/AIDS at the time and reaffirmed that through her teacher she had learned that AIDS does not spread by a mere touch or a hug. Thus, there's no reason you cannot be empathetic, compassionate and helpful towards an AIDS patient or any patient for that matter.

Who can forget her appeal for toilets, cases against dowry and the permission for girls getting equal chances at sports either? Although these issues are still prevalent

in a lot of areas, it's been rectified quite a lot in the past years.

But, the world is still not perfect. At least, Bangladesh is far from it. According to the UNICEF website, in Bangladesh, 95% know of the Meena television series, thus its impact is massive.

Meena was made to fix the problems in the villages of Bangladesh and a few other countries in South Asia. But after a long hiatus, I think she needs a comeback. Not just for the villages, but also for the cities, in fact, the country.

Meena needs to come back to advocate for the environment, and a better education system and awareness of our rights.

She should also give a leaf out of her book to women who claim to believe in equality but not feminism, whereas the latter originated out of a woman's plea to be equal to her male counterpart, both cerebrally and financially. The Sustainable Development Goals are still unknown to most people in Bangladesh. Through Meena, we can change that and enlighten more people.

Although Meena is just a cartoon character, she still, however, has the influence to empower and inspire. Having her back today could make a big difference, like it did the first time around. Not just as a voice of today, but also as a symbol of hope, a voice for a better tomorrow. We need Meena back!

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