

Why Meena Is A Feminist Icon

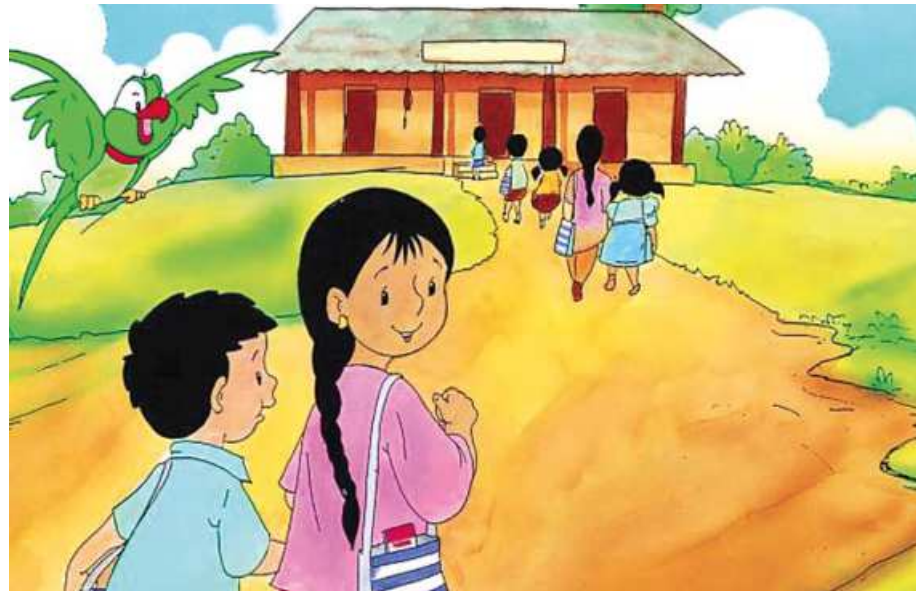
ADHORA AHMED

As a child, Meena was my alter ego. From time to time, I'd relapse into my obsession with her. If the scratches on my *Meena* DVD and extensive comic book collection are anything to go by, this cartoon is etched into my brain.

The recent ongoing conversations around patriarchy and misogyny made me realise how relevant Meena still is. I have to give her credit for teaching me things I probably wouldn't have learned at school, especially feminist causes. Let's look at three episodes and explore why this cartoon character is a feminist icon.

COUNT YOUR CHICKEN

One of the most iconic episodes of the cartoon is about one of the basic rights of every single human being: education. Meena wants to go to school, just like her brother Raju, but her parents see no point in an educated daughter. Because girls belong in the kitchen, right? *Wrong*, Meena rightfully thinks. With her brilliant mind, she defies patriarchal norms by sending her pet parrot Mithu to school, who imitates the lessons and relays them back to her. Her plan ultimately achieves more than her goal. She not only learns how to count, but also uses her new skill to catch a thief running off with one of their chickens. Her impressed parents learn a lesson, too -- ev-



ery girl should go to school, they *must*.

DIVIDING THE MANGO

In this episode, gender roles and inequality are questioned. Raju gets the bigger share of a ripe mango for breakfast, and a fuller plate at dinner. Why? Male privilege, of course. But, Meena does more household chores than him, so doesn't she deserve her fair share? Raju claims her work is too easy,

leading Meena to propose a challenge.

The siblings swap their workload the next day, but Raju regrets it very soon. He toils away the whole day, botching even the simplest of tasks. On the other hand, Meena enjoys a pretty relaxing day, other than struggling to tame their cow, Lali. By the end of the day, Raju is more empathetic towards Meena. The family, as a

whole, comes to value the importance of gender equality.

IT'S GOT TO BE A BOY

This episode addresses the problematic preference of male children in society. Meena's uncle is expecting a grandchild, but he's absolutely certain that it will be a grandson. His justification is that sons carry the name of the family, and can be anything they want. However, he is soon proven wrong when he discovers that the manager of his bank is a woman. He receives another blow when he learns that his newborn grandchild is a daughter. Meena introduces him to several self-sufficient women in the village, and shows off her mechanical skills when his tractor breaks down. At last, her uncle changes his sexist mindset, because he now knows that women are more than capable of doing everything men can.

Meena doesn't stop here. She raises awareness about child marriage, dowry, women entrepreneurship and female healthcare in other episodes. Perhaps it's time to binge on Meena again, and rekindle her spirit within us until we dismantle the patriarchy.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

BEING A JACK OF ALL TRADES



FARHAN ISLAM

It's a euphoric feeling for me every time I can help someone in a field they are not well acquainted with. Be it illustrating a poster for my elder sister's university programme or putting in hours of time teaching a junior how to give better speeches during debates.

The delight I get from their gratitude is enough to make my entire day, and that drives me to put more effort into improving whatever skill I have a fair grasp on. This delight pushes me forward to new experiences and higher levels, which I previously thought I could never cope with. Yet, somehow I always end up losing that drive for a plethora of reasons and circumstances; becoming unable to break through the glass ceilings whether those are self-made or not.

I believe an explanation for this is how I, and many of us in society, applaud signs of an objective form of tangible utility, achievement, and success. A lot of us initially focus on aiming for the zenith of whatever we dedicate our time to and the moment we realise what reality actually beholds in front of us, we pull ourselves back and contemplate the choices we made. Whether that reality comes in form of systematic barriers we have to face, or just simply the notion that we are not "good enough" and that there are millions of people who can contribute substantially more in the same avenues of interests and skills we have.

This is when the frustration kicks in, and we begin questioning ourselves while sulking over all our shortcomings. And that further leads on to asking ourselves "What is our purpose?" Because, we are equipped with so many things to offer others, yet we get lost at a certain point because of the ambivalence that is intimidated by these questions

we think of.

Hence, we do one of three things in response to this. Firstly, we might become stubborn and put in even more effort in one field particularly until that becomes an integral part of our lives. Secondly, we might convince ourselves to stay content being the person who can occasionally help others in a number of tasks because of our knowledge regarding those. And lastly, we might take a step back and opt for another new path; to seek a fresh beginning and test ourselves.

I believe the first two responses, regardless of whether it ends with someone becoming satisfied or not, bring a certain conclusion a person can adapt and make peace with. Whereas, the last one necessarily continues this cycle of looking for our purpose by gaining fresh knowledge and experience. We should not call this bad, because when we go through this all so familiar process again it feels revitalising and we get this new urge to learn more. As a result, we create more room to fill our enthusiasm, and that can uplift us to keep on striving forward yet again.

Although at some point in our lives we will have to limit our diverse range of expertise and settle for a primary option to pursue; being a "know-it-all" or a "jack of all trades" until that point is not futile. Because, we will still continue to go on these adventures to seek that significant purpose, so we need an incentive that brings joy to us in the process. For me, that incentive is being able to see people reward me with their appreciation for even the smallest of chores. And these people will still need us with our slightly above average skill set, to pitch in to make their lives slightly easier.

The writer is a high school graduate from BAF Shaheen College, Dhaka.