



Attempt to Unlearn and Understand Intersectionality in “Private” and “Public” spheres

—Nikhila Kalla

Short Articles

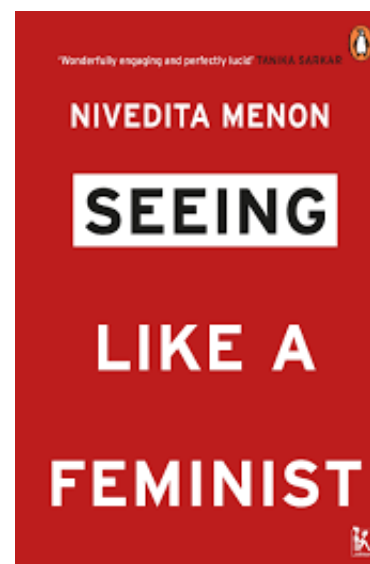
In an interview with Jay Prosser, Lauren Berlant stated that the:

“Public presumes private. Through this statement, she tries to build upon what we assume private is public. This essay starts with this quote to draw attention to what we perceive as “natural.”

In her book *Seeing like a Feminist*, Nivedita Menon questions several times about this natural. For instance, the sexual division of labour is extreme in most spaces of life. Female’s roles are perceived as “caregivers, loving, eternal affection.” The male has to be “strong, devoted, and the breadwinner of the family.” This naturally assigns women to private spheres of the home where they look after children, elderly, and do the chores like cooking, cleaning, and more. The man is assigned to the public sphere, where he goes out to earn money. The patriarchal familial rules gatekeep this idea.



Dr. Nivedita Menon



Seeing like a feminist: Cover

Menon quotes in her book, “The point is that the family we think of as natural is only one kind of family,” which is true. While we talk of citizenship identity as well, the child of a “heterosexual” couple often bears the father’s surname and caste. They are pushed into a patrilineal society right at birth. In this patriarchal setting, we believe that the natural family consists only of a father, mother, and children. It goes beyond erasing the existence of queer identities and re-establish the idea that queer individuals or queer couples cannot have (legal) children. They cannot make their own family.

Additionally, if we were to consider the case of children’s admission in school, the father (if alive) was required to be present during the admission process. This puts down the status of women as secondary, especially in the case of a single mother who has custody of her child. The country’s legal systems naturalised the patriarch as the head of the family because the existing legal system itself is a patriarchal one. We need to realise that what we consider natural is not natural; we are simply allowing a construct to exist because it has become a norm. A construct that exists is limiting. It limits the possibilities of ways we can live, the methods which can be better and allow all kinds of interests, groups, and ideas to exist. But patriarchy as an ideology is limiting us to believe that there is natural because it benefits it. It helps the gatekeepers of patriarchy by letting the current power structures survive.

It creates the hegemony where we believe that our mothers are not in the same footsteps as our fathers. We call ourselves progressive families where our daughters study, work and are even sent abroad. We call it empowerment and say, “oh, she is so independent!” in praise. But it also us who do not allow her love affairs with someone else. Forget someone from a foreign nation, but even someone within the country. And if she were to say, “I do not wish to marry. I live for my job.” The same patriarchal society that called her progressive will call her scandalous.

Citation information:

Nikhila Kalla 'Attempt to unlearn and understand intersectionality in "private" and "public" spheres' (2023) 2(1) Your Voice Magazine 3.

In Francesca Orsini’s chapter *Love Letters*, Orsini talks about how love letters are very private and intimate actions between – husband-wife, two lovers, or friends. It is a gesture and act of love. In the same essay, she describes one Parsi play between a man and woman. The man falls in “love at first sight” with a woman sitting at her window. She yearns for his love as well and writes him a letter. She later wishes to spend a night with him, and they do. When her parents find out about her affair, they marry her off to another man. And in this pain of not being with her beloved, she takes her own life while requesting the man to keep their affair a secret. The man has an unsuccessful suicide attempt and mourns her loss until his end. They reunite in the afterlife. This play was seen as scandalous. The reason – it was uncharacteristically for a girl to take the initiative in a love affair.

A woman must be pure, innocent, and caring. She must protect her chastity with her life. The concept of chastity also exists because we believe the woman belongs to her husband in normative patriarchal society. If she must be deflowered, it should be only by him. Chastity is held in high regard around the world, not just in India, to say. The whole story of the book *Chronicles of a Death Foretold* by Garcia Gabriel Marquez only takes place when Angela Vicario is found a non-virgin on her wedding night. Her brothers kill Santiago because he is “assumed” to have taken her virtue. All the killing in the novel happens over a fully functional woman’s broken hymen. Consensual adult relations or consensual heterosexual relations have been viewed as scandalous that, again, we wipe out the discourse about homosexual relations. Is it really scandalous for an individual (especially those from minorities – women, LGBTIQQ+, lower-class) to make decisions for themselves?

However, answering the question of how do we reconcile this gap is probably by questioning it. We need to look head-on with what exists as “natural” and “normal.” We need to question the ideological stances that we see around us, what we believe, and what people around us believe. The private is the public. There will exist inequity in our workspaces, classrooms, and even bedrooms until we do so. The eye and gazes of society lock us into this patriarchal system where we believe everyone cannot be equal. The key is only to question. We cannot overthrow patriarchy or normative idea on a day we choose, but rather challenge its position around us. We should stop taking these norms for granted and understand how our society limits our agency of thinking since we grow up under its influence. To begin by unlearning norms, we assumed as natural. There exists no natural, so we do not need to push ourselves to fit into it. The only way is to find better ways for all ideas, groups, and interests to coexist where power structures do not comply us with specific identities, labels, and roles.

Works Cited:

1. Berlant L and Prosser J, “Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant” (2011).
2. Orsini F, “Love Letters,” *Love in South Asia: A cultural history* (Cambridge University Press 2007).
3. Menon, N, *Seeing Like A Feminist*. Pearson. 2012.

About the Author



Nikhila is a graduate of Literary Studies and an avid writer. With a passion for analysing and critiquing cultural phenomena, Nikhila enjoys exploring the complexities of society through her writing. In her free time, she can be found watching classic films or indulging in her love of painting. Nikhila’s passion for storytelling fuels her writing, as she believes that the stories we create at ILF are an integral part of the human experience. Through her work, Nikhila seeks to shed light on the intricacies of the world around us and encourage others to think critically about our world.