
The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan

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Publication Info

Article History:

Received: 15-01-2023

Accepted: 03-03-2023

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BOOK REVIEW

Betty Friedan and her book 'The Feminine Mystique' majorly contribute to fueling the second wave of the feminist movement. The popularity of this book can be gauged from the fact that three million copies of the book were sold in the first three years. It is one of the major books of the 20th century for both its supporters and conservatives. The US Department of Labor ranked this book as one of the ten best books that established the importance and dignity of labor in America. On the other hand, in 2007, the conservative magazine "Human Events" ranked the book seventh among the ten deadliest books of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Betty Friedan in her book describes the status of women in American society after World War II. American women of the mid-20th century suffered from a sense of discontent despite their affluence. Women are neither able to express this feeling properly nor are they able to lead a normal life. When women approached psychiatrists about this problem, their femininity was questioned. Friedan characterized the disease as a problem that has no name (The Problem That Has No Name). In fact, this problem is the problem of identity which Friedan has named as The Feminine Mystique. The sole occupation of a mid-20th-century American woman was housework. Women used to get recognition from their husbands and their sons. Her whole life was spent just in being a perfect housewife. Women did not even have the right to think and decide about their own lives. Friedan's book, exploring the origin of these problems, the reasons for their origin, the reasons for their continuation and the measures to end it, communicates a new life in the feminist movement.

In this book of 14 chapters and more than 400 pages, there is a clear glimpse of Friedan's quality as an outspoken observer, speaker, presenter, correspondent and investigative tendency. Friedan provided a long line of evidence to support each of his points, consisting of numerous interviews, articles in contemporary women's magazines, and newspaper articles of the time.

In the context of the origin of this problem, Friedan presents many examples of how newspapers, magazines, schools, social

scientists, doctors, psychiatrists etc., elements of society have played their role in increasing this problem. First of all, they give newspapers and magazines a major reason for giving birth to this problem. Before and after the Second World War, newspapers and magazines created an environment that isolated women from the mainstream of society and imprisoned them in their homes. Where before the Second World War, the news was filled with articles of global, national, economic, social, and scientific importance, while in the newspaper around 1949, articles like increasing baldness in women due to excessive brushing and dyeing, newly married couples went on honeymoon, mutual fight & marriage day started being published.

In magazines where such female heroines were described before the world war, glorification was done who came out of the house and supported the economy shoulder to shoulder with men, who did adventure. After the world war, in place of these heroines, women who were full of the qualities of a perfect housewife were shown. In this way, newspapers and magazines gave important support in this vicious circle created around women.

Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique focuses on the ideal of the family in the post-World War II years where there are clear roles for men and women in a nuclear family. Friedan is writing at a time when ideas about the primary place of sex and sexual frustration in human psychology, developed by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, dominated. She states that Freud's ideas took hold in America in the 1940s when they were used to explain the achievements of earlier feminists and the problems caused by their influence on men.

For Friedan, Freud's theories were not universal truths for human beings, but the thinking of a particular person living in a particular era (Europe of the late 19th and early 20th centuries). Freud himself was a victim of sexual repression due to the abusive behavior of the society of his time and place, for these reasons, he found hysteria in his female patients. According to Friedan, both Freud's theory about men's sexual jealousy towards their fathers (the Oedipus complex) and his beliefs about gender were deeply personal. Supported by his society as well as Judaism, Freud realized that to be ruled by a man is a woman's true nature and to be jealous of him is her disease.

It is the same with his other theories where Freud highlights the different stages of brain and development related to human anatomy, where he talks about oral and anal stage of development and sexual development. For example, he talks about the pleasure that an infant derives from certain sensual experiences at specific points in its development as a social and sexual being. Here also he considered the inferiority of women as lack of gender. He believed that this inferiority of women is satisfied only after having a son. Freud considers the feeling of competition in women as a result of improper upbringing and an obstacle in understanding maternal skills in women. Friedan argues that by writing his ideas as repressed Penis Envy, Freud expressed his point of view by portraying women as a degraded

category unfit to participate in the competition that is biologically complete social and unable to reach intellectual development.

Since scientific evidence rejected the argument that women were less intelligent than men, Freud's followers in America emphasized physical inequality between men and women. Friedan illustrated through examples in the book how experts encouraged women to live in the role of wife and mother rather than resisting through work, education or feminism. Psychoanalyst Marynia Farnham and social critic Ferdinand Lundberg warned that education and career harmed home life and children and hindered sexual satisfaction. Meanwhile, psychoanalyst Helen Deutsch said that girls and women do not need to suppress their ambition completely but can fulfill it through their father and husband.

These beliefs reduced the fact of women's isolation in suburban households to a social problem related to political, legal and economic inequalities, which led to a failure to properly adjust to the realities of women's sexual roles. By definition, education, career and equal rights were detrimental to women. Friedan found that confining women to their homes, largely retreating from the harsh, chaotic world, had the potential effect of casting sex in a more positive light and allowing women and men to focus on themselves—"casting doubt on the higher aspirations of their minds and the soul". During the 1940s and 1950s, Freud's side dominated the media, the education system, the mental health profession, and popular mental health campaigns for parents, children, pregnant women, and the general public. For American women this "Freudian superego worked as Freud said the superego worked to perpetuate the past."

Friedan studied psychology in the United States during the heyday of Freudian psychoanalysis. Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, who was tutored by Anna Freud (Sigmund Freud's youngest daughter), was on the faculty at Berkeley during the years that Friedan studied at that university. Friedan also looked to the functionalist tradition popular in sociology and anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century.

According to the functional approach of anthropology and sociology, social institutions work together like the parts of the human body. They keep everything together and stable without duplicating any functions. In terms of gender roles, the influential sociologist Talcott Parsons argued, 'complete equality of opportunity is clearly incompatible with any positive solidarity of the family.' While he viewed women's reproductive work as complementary to men's, Parsons believed that women had no choice and must simply adjust. Sociologist Mira Komarovsky also stated that girls had to learn and adapt to their sex-prescribed gender role—they Accepted roles given to them by society, not by nature—excluding them from competition at school or work and suppressing feminine interests or idols. Women's identity should come from their gender roles, not professions. Anthropology was able to counter Freudian-functionalist views

of gender after anthropologist Margaret Mead's research in New Guinea led her to conclude that female and male personality traits are not determined by biology but are assigned to each gender. are determined by clothing or manners. But this idea was not in line with his argument that men's roles are assigned by society and women's roles are determined by nature. This was based on his observation that Samoan and other Pacific Island men envy and respect pregnant women. Friedan points out that even though Western societies glorify men's creative and intellectual pursuits, not women's reproductive functions, Mead's views were taken as evidence that career and motherhood are mutually exclusive.

From the beginning, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* has been criticized for focusing solely on middle-class white women. African American women who were victims of sexism and racism and the neglect of working-class women, the book becomes eligible for criticism. However, the women trade unionists of the working class inspired Friedan. Friedan has also been accused of exaggerating the originality of his analysis and underestimating women's participation in contemporary government and business. This can be partly explained by the need to keep a low political profile in the era of McCarthyism. He did not discuss his involvement with unions and left-wing publications in the 1940s, or his interest in radical thinkers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels at the college. Friedan has also been accused of failing to attribute his views to other sources. Other critics, including American studies scholar Daniel Horowitz and political scientist Alan Wolfe, charge Friedan to be an isolated woman whose views came through a unique personal development. Friedan provides a long series of interviews and illustrations throughout the book. But in many places, they seem simply unwieldy and only help in making the book thick and may cause disinterest in the reader.

The book's important role in the struggle for gender equality in the 1970s and beyond has given rise to many urban myths about it and misinterpretations of its message. Understanding the real meaning of this book is one of the main reasons for reading it at present. Another reason to read this book is that Friedan has used the term "feminine mystique" to criticize the subject in the book. It is still prevalent in contemporary society. Friedan's analysis remains useful in understanding the persistence and consequences of failing to see women as "no more and no less" than human beings.

In my opinion, Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* is a means of entertainment and raises voice for women who do not even talk openly about their problems. This book throws light on the exploitation and discrimination of women on the basis of gender. In fact, this book makes women aware of their rights and the exploitation against them and inspires them to adopt a new lifestyle in which education is their main weapon and to stand on their own feet is their main weapon. Although women in India have equal rights with men, but women still do not get a proper place in the society. Delhi is still far away for women in Indian society.