

Breaking Gender Stereotype: Women of India in Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl* – a Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to discuss and find out gender influence in Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl*. As Garrett points out gender is used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities and it is not to express whether the state of being male or female. Chetan Bhagat deliberately states that the book is for all Indian girls and clearly points that it is about women who are suffering because of patriarchal society. Though this novel portrays feministic points from male point of view it is an irrefutable fact that the novel is a clear description of gender influence, not to the state of being male or female. When the female protagonist's father is introduced in the novel and also the roles he takes, no role or domination of male is seen in the entire novel. In the novel *One Indian Girl* it seems that the society is patriarchal but the major role to take decision is given to matriarchal. The great philosopher Simone de Beauvoir says that no one is born a woman or man, one becomes one. It has been clear that the society the female protagonist lives gives her courage and guides her for the next status, not the sex whether male or female. As Sigmund Freud states Chetan Bhagat in *One Indian Girl* has attempted to give a clear picture of a girl's situation where the psychoanalytic theory is a predominant one. Despite the influence of post modern movements or identity, the novel *One Indian Girl* is a good attempt to portray studies of gender.

Key Words: Gender Influence, Cultural Theory, Cyber Feminism, Patriarchal and Matriarchal

In this research paper an attempt has been made show how cyber feminism in *One Indian Girl* has great relevance to the understanding and interpretation of gender studies. It is a fact that all men and women all over the world look at women from their point of view but here in the novel *One Indian Girl* Chetan Bhagat in his acknowledgements thanks all the women he met and interviewed. It seems that he has expressed based on the information collected. Chetan Bhagat made his relentless attempt to express both feminism and patriarchal society but he fails to understand matriarchal society where women always decide.

The novel *One Indian Girl* has been the best example for cyber feminism. Cyber feminism is the age influenced by technology. Here feminism is looked at technological artifacts, technological practices, systems of knowledge, institutions and competencies (Pramod K. Nayar-73). Chetan Bhagat has well described techno culture in his novel *One Indian Girl*. The protagonist of the novel *One Indian Girl* Radhika Mehta is a twenty seven year old girl and highly knowledgeable with techno culture. It is an evident that Chetan Bhagat intends to portray the society where technology also plays a vital role, though his feministic

view is broader. As stated earlier, Chetan Bhagat concentrated well in expressing both his friends and his opinions about Techno Culture and Working Times. It is a fact that working time is obviously not suitable to all. Chetan Bhagat expressed through the protagonist, Radhika that men designed this world. They decide office timings considering themselves but it is not suitable to females. Here is a controversy with the protagonist. Despite her living with her mother she says, “They don’t work for mothers, for instance” (259).

Before discussing about gender studies it is better to analyze Chetan Bhagat’s views on feminism. By the character Brijish, Bhagat gives definition to feminism and opines,

“I think all human beings should have equal rights. It’s not men versus women, it’s human versus human. Feminist is a wrong term. It should be humanist. The right question is “Are you a humanist? Well, everyone should be, he said” (135).

Here in this novel *One Indian Girl* Bhagat tries to attempt to make readers understand equal rights obviously feminism but equal rights are not doing something which are considered as bad habits truly injurious to health. “This kind. Smoking up on the beach before her wedding. It’s not what good Indian bahus do (137)”.

Despite the fact that Chetan Bhagat gives definition to feminism and strengthens the definition expressing the desire of having the social roles as wife and mother and inequalities in society at the beginning of the novel *One Indian Girl*, it is very clear that Chetan Bhagat portrays a typical matriarchal society through the characters, Neel’s wife Kusum, Radhika’s mother Aparna, her aunt Kamala bua and Brijesh’s mother Sulochana. Even though male characters are present, they have no role to take decision. It is obvious that *One Indian Girl* enlightens readers with the society where female controls (Shirin Kudchedkar-33). In contrast to feminism, Chetan Bhagat has attempted to define equal rights. “Perhaps equal rights means giving women the same rights, not the same things? Equal rights to get what they want, rather than equal rights to the same things men want (258)”.

It is an irrefutable fact that *One Indian Girl* is the representation of Chetan Bhagat as a feminist known as phallocentrism which is defined that male writers present women characters from male point of view (Bijay Kumar Das-92-93). When Radhika narrates the story, sometimes she speaks herself awkwardly, “... stop it, Radhika, I scolded myself” (11).

Chetan Bhagat mentioned many who helped him writing this novel *One Indian Girl* and started narrating the story of a girl who has been new to the techno culture, where no familiar person is available to speak with and guide her. The novel opens with the expression of a person who is sleepless. Here is a mention of a new culture to the family. “After all it is the first destination wedding in the Mehta family (Prologue)”.

No marriage was held earlier in a new place, where no familiar family friends and relatives were. For the first time, as she experiences in arranging and attending official meetings, she has made all the arrangements by own. It is an evident that her father Sudarsan has no role than being present in wedding place.

“Mom. Go sit with dad, please. I will sort this out, I said. Mom glared at me. How could I, the bride, do all this in the first place?” (01) This an evident that Chetan Bhagat tried to depict a typical matriarchal society and a society where no male child was born in the family. Though her elder sister’s marriage was held in their native place provided that Radhika Mehta’s family is familiar with the place, it is the protagonist’s (Radhika’s) intention to have her wedding in Goa.

Gender studies is interesting because it is related to studies of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and location (Avik Gangopadhyay-273). Teresa de Lauretis has opined that gender is the behaviours of various social technologies not of physical bodies and also no difference biologically but is a representation or development of language, culture and its institutions. Chetan Bhagat here deals with the life of an educated, talented and knowledgeable woman, who earn more than a SBI chairperson could not expect (81).

Chetan Bhagat has proved the concept of Judith Butler in many places in his novel. In terms of performance in occupying power in society, the protagonist (Radhika) works better even at the time she should be passive, when she was trying to get enough rooms for her wedding and also to call off her marriage. No role was given to masculine gender to decide on anything though her (Radhika’s) father Sudarsan and the present husband to be Brijesh are there. There is a mention that her father Sudarsan advised her to stand on her own feet (82).

Here it is obvious that Chetan Bhagat attempted to describe a situation when a female is in a position to decide on her life and the result of the decision too. When the three male characters namely Debashish Sen, Neel Gupta, and the present bride groom Brijesh have passively been waiting for her (Radhika’s) decision on her marriage with and her future life, she (Radhika) decides upon her marriage despite her interest and desire to bear children and have family. It is quite unimaginable and all the reader may curse for her decision but no end to her (Radhika’s) desire for having a family like her sister Aditi jiju Anil has. Chetan Bhagat depicts life of an Indian woman, who commits adultery. It is natural that gender and hetero sexuality are existing in nature (Judith Butler-09)

Chetan Bhagat intends to oppose Simone de Beauvoir in feminism. In *One Indian Girl* no women seem to be inferior to men but in the beginning as Maggu Radhika moved to New York, she decided to change herself to be expected by her fellow friends. It was the first time she tasted Whiskey. Though she was inferior to New York culture she was ready to adapt to change herself. No reason why Radhika praised Neel Gupta in the New York office at the beginning but the story had moved a life with Neel Gupta too in

the middle. Chetan Bhagat depicts all the masculine gender as rich and Radhika takes this as an encouragement and tries to earn more. If she (Radhika) does not compare herself with other she would not have desire to earn more. It is assumed that the world is masculine and male rules most of the places but it is fact that the managers are women or the first personnel proceed to execute the job is woman. Radhika was trained by the training manager Jane Rosenberg and joined her team (Bijay Kumar Das-156)

Chetan Bhagat advocates Judith Lorber's Liberal Feminism in his novel *One Indian Girl* through the characters Debashish Sen, Neel Gupta and the protagonist Radhika. It is an evident that Chetan Bhagat is well versed with the theories and laws of feminism. Theory

Simone de Beauvoir's definition to feminism lenses through woman's identity and her fundamental alienation to her body obviously her capacity and nature of reproduction. Chetan Bhagat's has proved this in *One Indian Girl* through the character Kusum as a true feminine. The protagonist's (Radhika's) desire to bear children is depicted, when she meets Neel Gupta with his family.

Chetan Bhagat attempts to give a definition to feminism through the protagonist Radhika,

"If their son can do this, why can't the baha? He said.

Now that is feminism; I said and high-fived him (137)".

It is not good for the bride, who gets married in days doing such things like drinking and smoking. Sometimes it is felt bad even by the bride groom. The protagonist Radhika goes for a trip not only with Debashish Sen and Neel Gupta, a married man, having two children Siya and Aryan but also the husband to be before a day of her marriage. During their travel it is obvious to discuss their personal desires but consuming drinks and smoking are not entertained in Indian culture. Dorothy Smith uses the notion of standpoint theory which emphasis one cannot decide where one stands in society. It could be a satisfactory theory for Radhika's decision to call off her marriage not only with Debashish Sen and Neel Gupta but also with Brijesh (Smith-20).

Chetan Bhagat advocates James Harrison's *Warning: The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to your Health* (1978) through the characters Sudarsan, the father of the protagonist Radhika and Neel Gupta, the husband of Kusum and father of two children. Both of their role with their family are described, though they earn and help them to run their family, they wish to avoid to interfere when feminine gender plays dominant role. In *One Indian Girl* Sudarsan, the father of the protagonist Radhika speaks less and his response is also limited to feelings.

"My father cries more than all the women in the house (82).

My mother looked at my father, a level- two glare. It signified, “Will you ever take the initiative?
(02)

Can you keep dad out of this, mom? I said (263).

Come, Aparna, My father said in his soft voice (264)”.

When Nell Gupta is presented with his family, his wife takes care of the children more than Neel Gupta and at the end Neel accepted Kusum’s divorce notice. Neel answers Radhika,

“Financially, she is more than okay. I gave her half of whatever I had. No questions asked. In return, she agreed to co-parenting and mutual consent” (238).

Conclusion:

This research study is an attempt to explore gender influence in the novel *One Indian Girl*. The society plays a predominant role in changing the system of age old protocols and lays down the way of life women have to live. No fixed identity of women is shown in this novel. When the opportunity allows women are also in a position to decide equally to men. There has been a belief that men is considered independent, superior and good at deciding but in this novel Chetan Bhagat lets women have equal rights in everything. Women are not inferior to men. Liberty is given to women to decide and plan for future. No interference of men is seen in the novel, when women decide.

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