

Stance of Modern Woman in Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl*

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Abstract

The women in the contemporary society, unlike the women of past generation, are equipped with higher education due to the positive change of perspectives in mindset of people. Education is indeed a potential tool to make one think and analyse. Hence today's women have the intelligence to discern the flaws in the patriarchal system of the society which is biased against women. Another constructive aspect of education is that it empowers women with eligibility for employment, and paves the way for earning her own money. But this financial independence does not really keep her away from troubles. Still problems exist for her, but in different forms. It is extremely challenging for a career woman to balance her personal and professional life. She is forced to make compromises in one for preserving the other. This issue can commonly be perceived in today's Indian society. But man does not face such difficulties, because he is excluded from most of the domestic responsibilities that enables him concentrate on his career undisturbed. This biased state is being noticed and opposed by the women of modern era. They started raising voice against the prevailing partiality and this situation is reflected in literature as well. The popular male writer Chetan Bhagat, for the first time, discusses woman's problems from feministic perspective in his novel *One Indian Girl*, through his spokesperson Radhika Mehtawho claims her right to uphold family and career, and refuses to forsake one for the other's sake.

Keywords: Feminism, Career, Family, Gender Inequality

Introduction

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literature as well. Many women writers take up this kind of issues of women, and exhibits through their novels. The popular male writer Chetan Bhagat, for the first time, discusses woman's problems from feministic perspective in his novel *One Indian Girl*, through his protagonist Radhika Mehtawho claims her right to uphold family and career, and refuses to forsake one for the other's sake.

About the Author

Chetan Bhagat, one of the famous Indian writers, is a successful novelist and non-fiction writer as well. He had penned ten novels so far that brought him massive success. He is considered as youth icon of India, because his novels majorly focus on the issues of Indian youngsters. Time Magazine has recognised Bhagat by including his name in the list of World's 100 Most Influential People in 2010. He is the biggest selling English language novelist in Indian history. Most of his novels have been adapted into films that too met with grand success.

One Indian Girl

Chetan Bhagat dedicates this novel to all Indian girls, especially the ones who dare to dream and live life on their

own terms. This book is the seventh novel of Chetan Bhagat in which a woman is the protagonist and the story is told from her perspective. It discusses the issue of modern women who are forced to choose between family and career, unlike men.

Radhika Mehta, the Protagonist

Radhika Mehta, the protagonist, is a twenty-seven-year-old woman who works as a vice president at Goldman Sachs, a highly-reputed investment bank in London. While introducing herself in the beginning of the novel, she openly declares that she has had premarital sexual relationships which may not be approved by the society, since she is a girl. "Radhika is well-aware that Indian society would not accept her if her past is revealed before it. That is why she warns the reader in the beginning that he is not going to like her too much. For she is cocksure that the society she lives in, is a far cry from being feminist." (Kaushik & Bhatt, 103)

Though her statement displays her as unconventional and exceptional, she is, in many aspects, similar to the typical Indian women who crave for love, and has several attributes of femininity. At the same time, she expresses her feminist standpoint as well throughout the novel.

During her school days, Radhika was so good at studies. She was the school topper in class twelve, got a seat in the best college in Delhi. She was extraordinarily studious there also that she got into IIM Ahmedabad. In spite of being an overachiever, she was envious of her sister Aditi who, though a mediocre student, was a hundred times more popular due to her good looks and on whom many boys had crushes. Bespectacled and having wheatish complexion, she had no boyfriends. But she had a longing for admiration and love that she did not receive until the completion of her education.

Debashish, her First Love

Selected in campus interview, Radhika moves to New York to start her career as an associate in Goldman Sachs, with the huge pay of 120000 dollars per annum. There she gets the acquaintance of Debashish who works in an advertising company. She is pleased to know that Debashish is interested in her, since she was so far

ignored by men. When Debashish states that she looks hot in a particular dress, she feels ecstatic. "For the first time in my life, apart from when I had fever, I had been associated with the word hot. Someone in the world found me hot. ... My soul break-danced inside me" (52)". At times of dating with Debashish, like any other girl, Radhika takes measures to look pretty. She even undergoes painful waxing session in order to attract Debashish.

She likes him more when he expresses his respectful opinion about the capabilities of women: "Why can't a woman do it? They are better negotiators. ... It's all this bullshit men spread. To scare women out of a role or position. Fact is, men are shit-scared of talented women like you." (49)

She is so eager to romantically involve with him. In spite of having feelings for him, she waits for him to make the first move, because Indian girls are expected to be coy. "... because I am a woman, I somehow also had to pretend to be innocent, as if I had no role to play in making anything happen (50)". Consequently, they get into sexual intercourse which is the first time for Radhika. Debashish already had experience with his ex-girlfriend. This premarital sex does not happen accidentally as in many cases; in fact Radhika desired for it.

Radhika enjoyed her first sexual experience. She thinks: "Why don't people do this all the time? Wow, why didn't anyone tell me sex feels so damn good?" (57) Though she tries to behave womanly in the beginning, she ends up in expressing her demand in sex. "I guess that didn't make me the shy and coy girl all Indian girls should be. Maybe it even made me seem like a slut. However, I would rather be a spent and finished slut than a good but frustrated Indian girl" (59). This tendency differentiates her from the archetypal Indian women.

Then they start living together and life goes on well. The only problem is that Debashish is not happy seeing Radhika thrive in her career. She is so successful that she gets 150000 dollars as bonus. She conveys this to Debashish expecting his profuse praise. But his response is: "Holy fuck! These banks ... That's nice, babe. I mean, I can't even imagine that kind of money" (78-79). His lack of enthusiasm and comparing attitude disappoints and annoys Radhika.

Radhika often opens the topic of their marriage to Debashish, mainly because of her mother's pressure to see her get married. But Debashish avoids to answer and finally one day he tells her that he cannot marry her, because she is not the sort of woman who fits into his expectations - he prefers his wife to be a homemaker, not the high-flying career woman. He states, "I visualized a future home. I would like my wife to be there for me and my kids" (99).

He demands her to quit her job if she wishes to marry him. As she refuses, he walks out of her home as well as her life, ending the relationship that lasted for two years. Tantry & Jaoolkar observe, "The fact of the broken relationship is that Debu is scared of having a wife with brains and practical efficiency." (681)

This predicament of women is quite common in Indian society. At the time of discussing marriage alliance itself, some boy's parents agree to proceed further only on the condition that the girl should give up her career. In some other cases, after marriage, husbands and in-laws force her to resign job for the sake of looking after familial responsibilities. Most of the women give up their career, though unwillingly, to save personal life. In other cases, even if she is allowed to work after marriage, it is extremely difficult for her to balance her personal and profession. Some women find another type of problem that if she earns more than her husband, it becomes intolerable and unacceptable for the male ego of husband. Chetan Bhagat discusses this type of issues of women in this novel.

Radhika, unable to bear with the loss of her only love, similar to other women, decides to resign her job to get Debashish back in her life. But incidentally, she sees him with another woman on bed. Broken-hearted, she decides to leave New York to get over Debashish. She gets a transfer to the Hong Kong branch of her bank.

Affair with Neel Gupta

In Hong Kong, she works with the handsome boss Neel Gupta who is twenty years older than her and has a family with a wife and two children. As she is suffering from depression, the comforting words of Neel provides with balm for her broken heart, and she is drawn close to him.

He expresses his love for her by gifting 26 roses for her 26th birthday. They go to Pungalusian island on a business trip. She feels attracted towards him in spite of herself. She dresses up well after the New York days with Debashish to look gorgeous to the eyes of Neel. She wishes to be liked by him, despite her conscience condemns her because he is married. Yet she gets carried away and they end up in having sex in the beach. She enjoys it more that she makes a comparison with the experience with Debashish. "If Debu was French fries, this was a gourmet six-course meal. If Debu was beer, this was champagne. If Debu was a boat, this was a luxury cruise." (180)

Radhika never felt that her sexual relationship with Debashish before marriage was immoral. But she feels guilty about having relations with Neel, a married man, and so tries to maintain distance from him after that incident. Once she happens to meet Neel with his wife and children. Like any other woman, she compares his wife Kusum's figure with hers and then feels ashamed about it. She thinks, "*why on earth am I comparing my body to hers? Is that all we women are? I am a vice president in Goldman Sachs. Why doesn't that make me feel as smug as knowing I have bigger boobs than Neel's wife? And why am I comparing myself to her at all?*" (189)

On seeing Kusum with her children, Radhika longs for having a family. "Kusum put out a hand for the fork. I surrendered it. She was staking her claim. She wanted her family back. Aryan went into his mother's arms. My lap, and even I on the inside, felt empty. I realized I wanted this too. I wanted kids. I wanted messy pasta dishes. I wanted iPhone-addicted daughters who had math as their favourite subject." (192)

She finds Kusum to be a nice woman which Neel too agrees with. But his complaint is that he and she do not share the connection. He stresses, "Not even a tenth of what what you and I have. None, actually." (196)

Despite her attempt, Radhika is unable to resist Neel. Therefore, they continue their relations and intimacy grows deeper. Radhika justifies her act: "Despite feeling immoral, there was also the matter of my loneliness-he made me feel less lonely. I wanted Neel in my life. Some one to treat

me like I was special and make me feel loved, every bit of me.” (197)

Their affair continues for a year. Then Radhika discusses with Neel about the insistence of her mother for marriage. When she talks about her wish to have a family, Neel's response is that he thought she was career-minded. He says, “it's just I never thought of you as the maternal type. I don't know if you were even meant to be a mother” (209). Infuriated by his words, she slaps him and asks him to get out her house. Then she decides to move away from him, and so gets a transfer again, this time to London.

Marriage Alliance with Brijesh Gulati

Brijesh Gulati is the man who Radhika's mother selects as the bridegroom through a matrimonial website. He works in Facebook, and seems to be okay from the beginning. Though Radhika finds him to be a stereotypical, boring person, she could find no reason to reject him and so she agrees to marry him. He tells her about his past love and has no problem as well in marrying her even after knowing about her two past affairs. Hence, a destination wedding is arranged for them in Goa.

Radhika's Resolution

A day before their wedding, Radhika's both ex-lovers, knowing about her marriage, rush to Goa to propose her for marriage. Debashish expresses his love admitting that he has realized that she is the best thing to have ever happened to him. Neel took a chartered flight to meet Radhika, and he has already divorced Kusum to marry Radhika. Radhika is really in a confused state of mind.

Then she, as guided by her inner voice which tells her that she deserves to be happy, reflects upon all the past events for half an hour in a composed mind, and eventually arrives at a firm decision. Subsequently, she fixes a meeting with Debashish and Neel together, and with Brijesh after.

First, she deals with Debashish in the meeting. She rejects his proposal saying that he is the kind of person who supports feminism theoretically but does not follow it in real life. She tells him, “You said fly, but when I flew high, you wanted to clip my wings. Fly, as long as you fly beneath me, is it?” (258)

Then she turns down Neel's proposal saying that he did not care about her having a nest - a family. Further she articulates her judgment about him: “what you love is only half of me. My other half is kusum, the woman you left. You want a party girl. Someone young. ... Well, I won't be this young girl forever. I don't know what Neel Gupta will do with me then. He likes Radhika, his young vice president, but will he like Radhika, the diaper-changing wife and mom?” (260)

After dismissing her exes, she meets her husband-to-be Brijesh who is supposed to marry her on the same day, and conveys that she has decided to cancel the marriage. Though she has nothing to say against Brijesh, she takes this decision due to the reason of finding herself.

Conclusion

Until this point of time, Radhika seems to be an ordinary woman who is driven by emotions. This resolution of her, taken by her rational mind, differentiates her from others. She does not let herself impelled by emotions this time to choose anyone of her exes for whom she had so much of feelings. And she also has the guts to cancel the wedding before all the guests and stay determined, and unyielding to the pressure of others. Her decision to live life on her own terms proves her to be a self-reliant woman. She is prepared to wait until she finds a supportive, understanding man who does not ask her to choose between career and family, and make compromises. Thus Radhika, as a representative, distinctly asserts the standpoint of modern women of India.

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