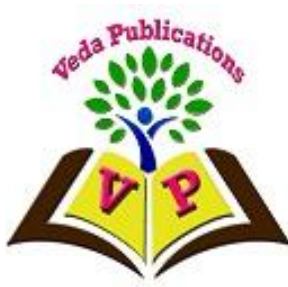


**FEMINIST ELEMENTS IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S ONE INDIAN GIRL**

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Chetan Bhagat is a writer who has definite ideas on the way social fabric is should be organized. He explores human relationships in relation to social, political and economic values. In this his novels have great sociological interest. This is also one of the reasons why he has received wide- ranging critical acclaim as well as a nearly equal share of blame. His latest novel *One Indian Girl* (2016) has been a case in point. While some reviewers have praised the novel as a psychological triumph others have held the author guilty of vilifying Indian womanhood. Some have seen it as a feminist piece others as a fraud on the progressive Indian woman. This paper seeks to examine how for the novel is feminist in its plot, characterization and overall ambience.

Keywords: *Human Relationships, Wide- Ranging, Vilifying Indian Womanhood, Psychological Triumph,*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Chetan Bhagat is a modern Indian writer pre-occupied with the fluid patterns of post-colonial life, swept as it is by socio-political issues ranging from corruption and cricket to education, gender-equality and questions of race, colour and language. He has often been in the eye of the storm in critical controversies and ideological debates. The one thing universally accepted about Chetan Bhagat is his special appeal to youthful professionals in various fields. This is because he deals with transitional issues like the breakdown of the joint family-system the system of traditional values and the crumbling walls of male hegemony and patriarchal authority. His very titles like *Five Point Someone (2004)*, *One Night@ Call Center (2005)*, *The Three Mistakes of My Life (2008)*, *Two States (2009)*, *Revolution 2020(2011)*, *What Young India Wants (2012)* (speeches and columns) *Half Girlfriend (2014)*, *Making India Awesome (2015)* and *One Indian Girl (2016)* - have a catchiness that pull the reader in, with their journalistic ring and suggestions of a stunt headline. Combined with this is the ever present first person narration of incidents that leads the reader along on waves of friendly confidential chat peppered with socio commentary that has varied political and ideological overtones.

In this, Chetan Bhagat emerges as an ideologue in the guise of a novelist. This is what makes his non-fictional works *What Young India Wants (2012)* and *Making India Awesome (2015)* the ideational key to his fictional works. He is a writer who fictionalizes reality to lend it a new urgency and immediacy to provoke the reader to meditate and debate on the issues implied in the slices of life presented in the novels. It is this that has led to the controversies surrounding his latest work *One Indian Girl*.

The feminist elements in this novel have been the subject of much debate. The author himself agrees that the novel could be considered 'feminist'. But some reviewers feel that the piece is not feminist enough because the protagonist Radhika Mehta, it is suggested settles down with Brijesh, the bridegroom arranged for her by her parents. This is viewed as a forced compromise with tradition, but Bhagat has, in the final pages, presented Radhika Mehta weighing the pros and cons of the three men in her life and

deciding in favour of Brijesh Gulati. In this she is thoroughly human as well as feminist in her own way.

This paper seeks to analyze how far the work is rooted in the feminist ideology as successfully tapped for fictional purposes. The back cover blurb of the Rupa edition has the following extract

Hi, I am Radhika Mehta and I am getting married this week. I work at Goldman Sachs, an investment bank. Thank you for reading my story. However, let me warn you. You may not like me too much. One, I make a lot of money. Two, I have an opinion on everything. Three, I have had a boyfriend before. Okay, maybe two. Now if I was a guy, you would be okay with all of this. But since I am a girl, these three things don't really make me too likeable, do they? (One Indian Girl,7)

This actually is the presentation of the puzzle of the novel. There is a contrast built up between what Radhika Mehta actually is and what people the 'reader', would expect her to be. Radhika Mehta does not feel the reader may like her, because of the three "three disqualifications". She makes a lot of money, much more than what average boys can make, she has her own opinions on everything (in other words she is a free thinking individual) finally she has had boyfriends. With this she presumes that she has some boyish "mannish" attributes and the question is how far such a girl is likeable. The whole novel reveals a question of the likability or otherwise of the chief protagonist.

Radhika Mehta is a brilliant scholar; she is very good at drafting business deals, amalgamation, liquidations, and resurrections through sale of distressed assets. She works in an investment bank, Goldman Sachs. She is very popular with colleagues and bosses and her professional efficiency gets her high scores, a handsome salary and generous incentives. But all through the novel her basic femininity and her traditional mind set, the 'mini-me' within her gives her a feeling of unconscious guilt over her achievements, which are far beyond traditional gender expectations on women



consciously choosing to play second fiddle to their male counter parts.

Her two love affairs (?) lead to sexual consummation and sensual harmony. Both the relationships are sensually cathartic but intellectually and in essence abortive. Debu is not able to digest her higher earnings and professional success. He feels inadequate. His feminism is only a facade for conservative male chauvinism that confines women to domestic roles like child bearing and rearing, hospitality and consolation. What he wants is a mother- figure a consoler and an outlet for his libidinous urges. He cannot stomach an intellectual equal and an out performer as a wife. She tries to patch up with him as the following conversation will reveal. But all such attempts prove a miserable failure Radhika melts into sentimentality, but Debu's fully frozen.

'You are bored of me?'

'Don't be stupid'.

'So?'

'I am being calm, okay? But I have an image of the wife I want. The mother of the kids I want. I am not judging you, but I think I want a housewife'. 'What?' I said. My fork almost fell out of my hands. 'It's what I have seen growing up. I go to work, make the money. Wife takes care of the home. Simple needs happy family'. "What are you talking about, Debu? Didn't you say women could achieve anything today? Didn't you encourage me when I had to apply for distressed debt?" 'I did. I still admire you. I respect all women who achieve big things. I think it is great ...' 'But you can't be with them?' 'I don't know. Maybe not. Maybe I could. But you made me think about marriage and I did. I visualized a future home. I would like my wife to be there for me and my kids'. (OIG,99)

So he slowly breaks away from her, refuses to listen to her offers of quitting her job and setting down as Mrs Debu. The plain fact is Debu is afraid of having a wife with brains and practical efficiency. Naturally Radhika Mehta is forced to bury the affair,

throwing her cell phone over Brooklyn Bridge, though she cannot altogether throw away Debu and memories of him.

The same is the case with Radhika's affair with Neel Gupta. He is a married man with his own family, but he considered Radhika Mehta as a hundred percent professional unfit for motherhood and family life. This wound Radhika Mehta's feminine pride as the following episode shows

What do you want, Radhika?' Neel said.

I kept silent.

'A future? I am twenty years older', he said.

'You said age doesn't matter in love. Didn't you?'

'I am married. I have kids. So much baggage.'

'Exactly. So what am I doing with you?'

'Aren't you happy with just what we have?' Neel said. He seemed to be genuinely confused. 'Would you be? If you were in my place?' I asked, looking him squarely in the eye. 'We have our work. We have love. We have excitement. We have friendship. We don't have the predictability and monotony of a married couple'.

'You make marriage sound so bad. You are married. The whole world gets married'. 'Clarify this for me. Do you want to get married? Or are you feeling stressed only because your mother wants you to get married soon?' 'Eventually I do want to, Neel. How could you think I won't? I want marriage, kids, family'. 'Really?' 'What do you mean, really? I do. I want Sunday IKEA trips with my husband and a whole bunch of kids. I want to wipe my kids' messy faces when I feed them. I want to bake cookies for them. Yes, yes I do'. 'Really, Radhika?' Neel said. He looked at me gobsmacked, as if I had revealed my secret desire to join the ISIS. 'Yeah. Why?' 'I thought you were career-minded'. 'Excuse me? What is that supposed to mean?' I said my voice ice-cold (OIG,206-207)

'She is appreciated as a working automaton that has all the makings of a woman to satisfy men but she is supposed have no maternal instincts or any depth of femininity that finds fulfilment only in motherhood and the propagation of life in both its



biological and cultural manifestations Radhika Mehta feels insulted and so moves to London.

It is then that Brijesh enters her life and the marriage is arranged. It is a destination wedding in picturesque Goa and here, Radhika Mehta has a unique experience. The two previous lovers come up with offers of marriage. Debu claims he is her first love and he has not been able to find her equal among the women he has encountered. Neel, on other hand has divorced his wife because Radhika Mehta is non-pareil as a woman and companion. He offers her, temptations of family life and has charted a flight for their flight into a new life.

Brijesh on the other hand is ready to accept her for what she is. Not merely that, he is ready to wait. He actually comes forward to defend her

What kind of a girl's is this?' Brijesh's mother said. 'I told you. I have a defective piece. My other daughter is golden. Such a nice, good bahu she is', my mother said. 'Enough, Aparna aunty', Brijesh said. Everyone in the room looked at him, surprised. 'She may regret her decision to marry me. It doesn't make her defective'. Through my tears I looked at Brijesh. Despite what I had done to him, Mr IT guy could still actually stand up for me. It only made me feel worse.(OIG,265-266)

Radhika Mehta understands his true manliness. During the last sea side walk, she confesses:

Thanks for supporting me in front of the elders yesterday,' I said. We walked on the Marriott beach one final time. I don't like raised voices, or insulting people, especially in public', Brijesh said 'you had every right to insult me too. You can now. We are not even in public. He looked at me for a second. He shook his head and gave a sad smile. 'I guess I never understood women anyway. I thought I did, a little bit. Clearly, I still have a long way to go', he said. 'You understand people and you understand kindness. You are a good guy, Brijesh. I am the one who is messed up. I need clarity'. 'Hope you find it. What do you plan to do, anyway?' 'For now, I will go back to work. Maybe apply for some visas. Then take a long vacation. Maybe one of those round-the-

world tickets. The ones that let you fly in one direction. Just keep going'. 'Well, the world is round. So you can't keep going. You will eventually have to come back home. Come back to reality (OIG,266-267)

Thus the novel records Radhika's emotional odyssey through the US, Slanglai, and London and then Goa.

The narration looks episodic but the unifying figure of the protagonist and her evolution lends the novel a unity of structure and thematic coherence. Feminist issues are behind all the episodes. The novel successfully exposes the false notions of male cupidity and Radhika is portrayed as a well rounded character quite feminine in her impulses, instincts and emotional nature and feminist in her ideological orientation. She cannot be taken in by mere cant and can see through male hypocrisy. Through some of her actions may look aberrant, she never loses her feminine roots and her final choice of Brijesh as life partner is absolutely right.

But some critics have questioned how Raadhika who is so successful in her professional life could have sunk into sensuality with Debu and Neel. The answer is to be found in the psychological impact of loneliness and dislocation. In her youthful bravado, Radhika takes liquor and liquor has an unhinging effect on the moral sense and the immediacy of the sensory provocation makes her succumb to the call of the flesh. And the sense of security which her two lovers give her makes her continue the relationship till the two are exposed in their false positions.

Radhika's case is unique not typical all Indian girls. That is why the author has titled the novel *One Indian Girl* and not *An Indian Girl*. Of course the author could have exercised greater economy in the pages that describe the promiscuous relationships but there too the descriptions have a functional purpose in showing how the male can reduce the female to utter passive submission. Both Radhika's lovers are experts at sensual engineering. No wonder they succeed in silencing Radhika's 'mini-me'. They also reveal the degree to which Radhika feels betrayed in her two relationships. This makes her sadder and wiser in making her final choice. Thus the novel is a faithful record of the feminist quest of a feminine protagonist Radhika is in search of the



fulfillment of her true self. In a sense she succeeds in her quest. Her Success Is Shown As Emerging From The Burning Fires Of Bitter Experience.

CONCLUSION

The novel is a fictional triumph. It is truly feminist. We find the protagonist attain self knowledge and self realization. There is nothing wrong in accepting an arranged marriage. Radhika's does so as a redeemed woman who can understand herself and her world. She is no passive sufferer but an active chooser.

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