

## Neo feminism in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl

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### Abstract

*Neo feminism is symbolically important because it signifies a commitment to women's empowerment and appropriates an importantly radicalized term, while also recognizing that the approach is new because it incorporates intersectional anti-subordination analysis and responds to observed problems with past interventions (Gruber 2014). It is an emerging view of empowered woman who is conventionally feminine. The term is widely used in the early 21st century which refers to a popular cultural trend which champions the free choice of women in appearance, lifestyle, and sexuality. This consumerist orientation retains the advances of legal equality in political space but urges women to celebrate their femininity in their personal lives, a category that includes careers, clothing, and sexuality. "We need a new language, better words that can more closely describe women's fear of and resistance to one another; words that will not always come out sounding like dogma. (Moraga 1981b: 30)". The present paper tries to critically analyze the various facets of neo feminism in an Indian society with reference to Chetan Bhagat's novel One Indian Girl. Radhika Mehta is not only intelligent but also successful in her career and this quality makes it difficult to be loved. She expands on why she 'finds it difficult to get love' and the reason why the society judges women achievers, especially in India.*

**Keywords:** Sociocultural, Postcolonial, Feminism, Intelligent, Successful.

## INTRODUCTION

Feminism is "the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes" (Encyclopedia Britannica). According to Cambridge Dictionary, "Feminism is the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state" (Cambridge Dictionary). Over the years it experienced different stages of demanding equality and protesting the practices of patriarchal society. The plight of women's existence has been studied through male perspective which shows that women are constantly treated as secondary to men, however Chetan Bhagat unveils the untold feelings of women in a new light by exploring the problems of women who are already empowered. Most of his novels are realistic and very close to the real-life situations of the contemporary period. If one has to interpret the feministic arguments in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl it is important to have an overview of the three waves of feminism, which were the movements seeking justice for women's right to equality. The first wave feminism was during 19th and early 20th centuries which is considered as the suffragette movement. It highlights different issues related to property, marriage and voting rights. In this wave, feminists focused on certain issues of sexuality and reproductive rights of women. The second wave was from 1960s to 1980s which dealt with the inequality of laws, cultural inequalities, discriminations in educational and employment opportunities as well as the status of women in society. The third wave (from the 1980s to early 2000s) is said to be Revisionary feminism or post feminism, investigating connection between gender and language including women publications. In the third wave of feminism, women's viewpoints connected to socio-political and financial factors are given importance along with the issues of class and race. In the post-independence period, there appeared various renowned women writers who had enhanced Indian English

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fiction with their innovative ideas of feminine sensibilities. Indian women are given ample space to make their individual progress and contribute to the development of the nation. They exhibit various abilities like vehicle driving, digital financing, workplace balance and other leadership skills. They are very ambitious, career oriented and individualistic by nature and they strive for perfect self-esteem to meet their goals. They are advanced in some traits like smoking and alcoholism dating, premarital sex and live in relationships. It is very much like neo feminism which refers broadly to any recent manifestation of feminist activism, mainly to distinguish it from the first-wave feminism. In 1982, in his best-selling book of Jacques J. Zephire uses French feminist Simone de Beauvoir as *Le Neo-Feminisme de Simone de Beauvoir*. In her *écriture féminine* Luce Irigaray indicates that women have an essentialist femininity. Later, the writers and popular culture commentators continued to describe the term as essentialist feminism. It has been used by sociologists to describe a new popular culture movement that celebrates both the feminine body and women's political achievements. In recent times Aya Gruber has also seen the emergence of 'trauma feminism'. Substantial percentage of women have experienced trauma, primarily sexual events; that the experience of the traumatic event is constitutive, or at least a substantial part, of women's identity; and that women are perpetually at risk of suffering emotional distress when the trauma is triggered. Trauma feminism posits a unique, intimate and emotional woman's experience. Trauma feminism shares space with dominance feminism regarding the female condition as one produced by male domination. Unlike dominance feminism, trauma feminism's main prescription is not reversing the gender hierarchy through prohibitive and punitive intervention, but to endorse the prohibition of traumatizing actions and punishment of traumatizers. The primary prescriptions of trauma feminism involve therapy, self-care, identifying and avoiding triggers, creating social practices for trauma avoidance like bystander intervention, and encouraging reporting. (Gruber 2014)

Neo-feminism is a term used to describe a wave of feminism that emerged in the late 20th century. Chetan Bhagat's women protagonists are highly independent. The place of action of his fiction is set in the bustle and hustle of Metropolitan Indian urban communities where men and women are no more seen as superior and inferior. Bhagat's fiction is more representative of feminism rather than masculinity. He demonstrates his concerns more to women than to men. Bhagat believes in empowering women and his fiction unquestionably gives cultural shocks which are unavoidable effects of globalization, modernization, and corporate exploitation. Chetan Bhagat's women characters exhibit the traits of neo feminism. They are advanced, educated and modernized and are extremely practical in their lives. Most of the time they demonstrate their radical and progressive behavior. They are bold and courageous who attempt to respond and revolt to change the rigid circumstances around them. Traces of feminist issues have appeared in his novels like *One Night @ Call Center*, *Two states*, and *half girlfriend* which are entirely different from the views of established feminist women writers of India and abroad.

A teaser on YouTube introduces the 9th novel of Chetan Bhagat as "Hi, I'm Radhika Mehta and I'm getting married this week. I work in a top investment bank. Thank you for reading my crazy 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 sex before. Now if I were a guy, you'd be cool with all this. Since I am a girl, these things don't really make me too likeable, do they?" (Rokomari 2017). *One Indian Girl* is a neo-feminist novel which explores the themes of gender inequality, feminism, and the immigrant experience. Radhika is a successful investment banker who moves to New York City to work and is determined to make her own way in the world. The novel explores the need for women to be financially independent. She struggles to balance her career, relationships, and her cultural identity. Her journey is not without challenges. She faces sexism and discrimination in the workplace. She is also criticized by her family and friends for not conforming to traditional gender roles. However, Radhika perseveres and eventually achieves her goals. She becomes a successful businesswoman and role model for other women. The novel also challenges the traditional view of women as homemakers and caregivers. Radhika shows that women can be successful in any field, regardless of their gender. Bhagat's novel shows that financial independence is essential for women's empowerment.

### **Neo Feminism**

*One Indian Girl* unveils the story of Radhika Mehta, daughter of SBI Branch Manager Sudarshan Mehta and home maker Aparna Mehta.

The story revolves around New York, Hong Kong, London and Goa. In Radhika's endeavors to settle on a choice to get married. As the story moves on, the reader comes to know the two versions of Radhika, the ideal lover, daughter, sister and a dedicated professional. Being an intelligent and a hard-working girl since her childhood, Radhika manages to secure an association position at Goldman Sachs in New York. Very soon, she starts relationship with Debu who works in an advertising agency. After having a conflict of opinions with Debu, about her question of her motherhood, he moves to another apartment of his old roommates. Radhika arrives there to let him know about her resignation. To her surprise she notices Debu and a White girl lay naked intertwined with one another on the bed. (108). She is a waitress at Chipotle, a Mexican fast-food chain. At that point of time, Radhika decides to move away from New York.

She accepts her parental proposal of arranged marriage in Goa with Brijesh Gulati who deals with Facebook. Shockingly, her two ex-boyfriends Debu and Neel Gupta appear there to marry her. Debu wants to marry Radhika and forces her to change the groom Brijesh with him because he laments his act of rejecting Radhika from the beginning. Then again Neel Gupta is prepared to elope with the 'girlfriend he owes' on her traced plane. The sudden change in their behaviour makes her to think, since they both believed that she was not 'a sort of conjugal material'. So she retorts their attitudes when they arrive Goa and plead her to cancel her wedding with Brijesh. She makes it clear to both that they are not her choice of marriage. She reminds Debu how he could not handle her success as Vice President in Goldman Sachs. and adds that she wants to achieve more success in her professional life. Debu admits that Radhika has the complete package of qualities like smart, caring and humble and easy to live with. He remembers her giving surprise parties. Radhika wants to have a family and be a good mother to her kids. She remembers how Debu comments, "[...] I never thought of you as the maternal type. I don't know if you were even meant to be a mother." (210) In course of their communication she even slaps him and reminds how he has reacted when she gets her first bonus. She questions where his feminism has gone. He admits that he felt insecure when she earned three times as much as he did. (119). Radhika tells him how much she cared for him, "came to Brooklyn to tell you I would resign. I wanted to propose to you that night. [...] I even brought a ring." (118). Radhika was even ready to leave her job to become the mother of his kids. "He thinks I wasn't meant to be a mother, How could I ever love this man?" (210) She understands that there is no future with him.

In Goa, when Neel comes to plead Radhika to reconsider about her marriage with Brijesh and marry him, she looks at him and says that his divorce with Kusum does not bring her any kind of fulfilment in her personal life. She makes it clear that her beauty is not permanent to be a party girl always. It is a question to her if he will like Radhika as a diaper-changing wife and mom in future. She remembers how she objects Neel's stay and questions, "What am I to you Neel? A stress ball?" (198). Neel is twenty years older than Radhika. When Radhika discusses regarding their marriage, Neel says "I am married, I have kids. So much baggage." (206). She questions, "[...] Today you are here at my home because you had a tiff with your wife. Tomorrow she will bake cookies for you and you will be home with her. What does it make me? Ms Standby?" (199).

After speaking to both, Debu and Neel together, she tells them that she is not going to compromise and settle for less in life asks them to 'fuck off' (260) from her life. They tell Radhika that she is free to choose anything between career and home, however Radhika feels it still unfair and says, "You know what women really want? We don't want to choose. We want to fly and also want a beautiful nest. We want both." (258). Bhagat reflects Radhika as a new woman who can fix her problems with cool and consistent behavior especially when she is about to marry Brijesh. In course of their discussion, Radhika asks Brijesh if he is aware of terms like 'feminist' 'gender equality'. He replies as 'equal rights for women'. She defines as, "Feminism is a movement that seeks to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women. A feminist is someone who believes in this movement. (135). Brijesh says, "I think all human beings should have equal rights. It is not men verses women" (135).

In an interview Chetan Bhagat expresses his opinion on feminism as, "Feminism is a very broad topic, and I couldn't have dealt with every portion of it in a limited page frame. So, I've covered the things I've seen in my life happening to be determined, opinionated, independent women. (CNN News 18, "Chetan Bhagat Talks About 'One Indian Girl', Feminism and More").

Chetan Bhagat has explored the excitement of youth and adolescent by utilizing bolder images and new contemplations of love and romance. Through his writings he has conveyed that Indian women ought to enjoy her rights just like the men do in a society. That is the reason his women characters are extremely aware of their rights and live in their desired ways. Aysha Bhoomi in her article *Relevance of Erotic Odyssey in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl*, she asserts as, "In the novels written before, Chetan Bhagat has presented erotic symbolism in somewhat disguised form, but this latest novel represents the growth and maturity of the novelist because here he demonstrates how an educated Indian Girl prefers to enjoy the freedom of libido even before wedding" (Bhoomi 38).

Radhika's confession is an example of her modern mindset. 'Hi, I am Radhika Mehta, and I am getting married this week. I work in a top investment bank. Thank you for reading my crazy 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 sex before. Now if I were a guy, you'd cool with all this. Since I am a girl, these things don't make me too likeable, do they?' (Bhagat 4). Hence, the true revelation of Radhika will surely knock the minds of conventional Indians; however, the new generation undoubtedly enjoys it to a greater extent. The book digs into the profoundly rooted patriarchy of Indian culture and the confinements that are not yet discussed which exist around. Radhika manages an insecure boyfriend who cannot earn more than her and later a married boss who becomes her lover, however, lately perceives that she may also want to begin a family. None of the men she meets can comprehend that she can manage to have both the worlds- home and profession. The instance is not only unique to Radhika but also applicable to many other educated women of India. The acclaimed Indian author and journalist Khushwant Singh properly says as, "

Love is an elusive concept and means different things to different people. There is nothing illusive about lust, because it means same things to all people: It is the physical expression of liking a person of the opposite sex. Cuddling, Kissing and fondling leading to sexual intercourse. Love cannot last very long without lust. Lust has no time limit and is the true foundation of love and affection. (Singh 167). Radhika truly takes after the supposition of Khushwant Singh where he trusts, "Only a life for Live Sex is important, when it is denied, it becomes more important, the need of the Body is above religious taboos and the notions of morality" (Singh 137-139). Had it not been in this way, Radhika would not have had such an individual disposition about her closeness with Debu. Richa Tripathi in her review asserts about *One Indian Girl* as, "This novel of Chetan Bhagat deals with the most cliché question, 'what women really want?' Unlike his previous novels, this time writer pens a female as his protagonist, to raise bigger issues such as gender equality, society verses individualism, feminism, liberalism and humanism" (Tripathi, "Book Review of Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl: An Answer to What Women Want by*").

Chetan Bhagat attempts to mirror the liberated, modern and independent women who believe in liberty. Radhika Mehta, like any other independent Indian woman, rises as a warrior who knows how to learn from her own experiences and how to live life on her individual terms. The picture of woman on the cover page is appropriate to catch the attention of the audience as every man needs to comprehend what woman's needs and wants are. Her ethnic appearance in sari, chain, nose pin and bun convey her constant struggle to meet all social desires. Her bowed head and tilted look give readers a more profound understanding of his drive for equal human rights and equivalent human opportunity. 'Why only me, every time?' It is a question exhibited in her gaze that Radhika as often talks about with her mother and her lovers. It is a configuration to represent an inquiry among readers with the assistance of their heated discussions that incite reflection. The red clothing around her resembles a marriage trap to confine a free flying bird with wings. The Statue of Liberty in New York City, is symbolic to celebrate independence and freedom after the abolition of slavery of any kind, represents the true internal identity of the protagonist who is an Indian. The entire plot moves around Radhika's journey to locate her actual internal identity while she attempts to meet the expectations of everyone around her. The first-person narration of Radhika's thoughts plainly offers the reader to peruse her mind and give them the chance to empathize with her. The combination of her moderate reactions and the severe calls of her inward voice 'Mini me' is the principal fascination for the reader to feel connected with the plot and the characters and build up an elated opinion of Radhika. The entire story revolves around the quest for their desires and their strength to face the constraints despite all odds. Strangely, this is a novel that characterizes women's liberation

from various points where the protagonist's antifeminist mother assumes an exceptionally fascinating part to feature this great topic with the assistance of her clever and witty remarks in a realistic way. The author positively needs to release all the stereotypes of being Indian, for example, misguided assumptions, prejudiced tendencies, deceptive tactics and emotional blackmail done by the Indians for the name of customary protocols.

Chetan Bhagat seems to be propelled by *Fifty Shades of Gray* by E. L. James, since his striking portrayal of sexual relations between Debu and Radhika makes her erotic as well as romantic and exotic to some extent. All through her romance and all through the novel, she appears to be not able to escape from the feeling of being a bitch. It is felt as though Chetan Bhagat has the message that a lady who engages herself in sexual relations before marriage is not really a bitch, however it is women's liberation. Nevertheless, Bhagat writes in the Acknowledgment section of the novel that his examination procedure did not include books but interviewing a hundred women including the "people I met in my motivational talks," and "that Serbian DJ, the Indigo Stewardess, the hotel staff wherever I was [...]" (Bhagat 2016, 18).

## CONCLUSION

Towards the end of the novel, Brijesh advises Radhika to wait for a man who can inspire, understand, and support her to become a banker and a mother. He says, "[...] you are not just one Indian girl. You are one special Indian girl (270). When Radhika cancels her wedding with Brijesh, he tells his mother that he cannot marry just because it is convenient. At the same time, he gives a box of tissues to Radhika to wipe her tears. She wonders at his act of kindness. Chetan Bhagat reflects that women need to be understood properly. He probes to find out what Indian women want and what feminism matters to them. Bhagat's ambition to write a book in female first person narrative is accomplished in his novel *One Indian Girl*. As a male writer writing about a woman, dealing with feminism can be considered as a great challenge to the existing Indian Writing in English. He highlights the sensitive predicaments of women and the way they handle them with the changing norms of societal values.

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