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Portrayal of Gender Inequality and Female Empowerment in "One Indian Girl" by Chetan Bhagat

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Abstract

For too long, a moiety of the populace of the macrocosm as women has been held captive by patriarchal societies, patriarchal attitudes of men, irrational orthodox traditions and religious superstitions. Due to these misconceptions, women had to bear the brunt of socio-economic, political discrimination. Various feminist writers exposed the malfeasance and discrimination against women in their writings, inspired by which women commenced elevating their voice for their rights. A girl who is born and raised as a woman in a patriarchal culture has the choice and the power to reject the stereotyped sexual identity that society has assigned her in order to assert her human rights. One Indian Girl, one of Chetan Bhagat's books, finest exemplifies this subject because Radhika Mehata, the Indian girl who serves as the protagonist's spokesperson throughout the story, is the focus of the story. The author has won praise for the deft way in which he uses his novels to portray such personal and societal issues for debate. The purpose of this research paper is to examine how Chetan Bhagat's book "One Indian Girl" depicts gender inequity and female empowerment. The protagonist's experiences and difficulties, societal expectations placed on women, and the examination of issues like cultural standards, career objectives, and interpersonal relationships will all be covered in this essay. This research study aims to comprehend the author's depiction of gender dynamics in current Indian society and its implications for female empowerment through a close reading of the novel, supported by critical analysis and pertinent theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: Gender inequality, female empowerment

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat's book "One Indian Girl" covers the experiences of Radhika Mehta, the protagonist, as she negotiates her identity in modern Indian society while navigating the difficulties of cultural expectations. "Radhika Mehta, in the novel One Indian Girl, as the title implies, is an Indian girl who migrated to the United States with a dream of her career and future. She is an employee at the Distressed Debt group of Goldman Sachs, a promising investment bank." Bhagat The story explores the difficulties faced by people who are caught between societal expectations and their own ambitions for personal fulfilment and self-actualization, set against the backdrop of a culture with strong conventional standards. Gender inequality remains a significant issue in societies around the world, and India is no exception. In the novel "One Indian Girl," Chetan Bhagat provides a compelling narrative that sheds light on the pervasive gender inequalities and societal pressures faced by women in Indian society. The novel explores the complexities of gender roles, societal expectations, and the ways in which individuals negotiate their agency and empowerment. This research paper aims to delve into the portrayal of gender inequality and female empowerment in "One Indian Girl" and to critically analyse Chetan Bhagat's treatment of these themes. By examining the protagonist's struggles, relationships, and

choices, this paper seeks to explore how the novel challenges societal norms and encourages a reevaluation of traditional gender roles.

India is not an exception to the fact that gender inequality is still a major problem in cultures all around the world. "The twenty-first century witnessed huge changes in the Indian way of life under the influence of modernization, westernization, industrialization, technical advancement, and population mobility across the globe ^[1]." "However, the moment a baby is born the first thing that comes to mind is "boy or girl?" and the issue is beyond just the biological one ^[2]." Chetan Bhagat's book "One Indian Girl" tells a gripping story that focuses attention on the pervasive gender inequality and social pressures that women in Indian society must contend with. The novel examines how people manage their agency and empowerment as well as the intricacies of gender roles, cultural expectations, and norms. This research paper will examine how Chetan Bhagat handles the topics of gender inequality and female empowerment in "One Indian Girl" and provide a critical analysis of his approach. This essay aims to investigate the ways in which the novel questions societal conventions and promotes a reevaluation of conventional gender roles by focusing on the struggles, relationships, and decisions of the protagonist.

The portrayal of gender dynamics in the work will be examined via a feminist perspective in this essay. In order to examine the author's portrayal of gender inequity, female agency, and the potential for empowerment critically, it will make use of pertinent feminist theories and concepts. The impact of cultural norms, societal expectations surrounding marriage, job aspirations, and the interaction of gender with other parts of identity are important topics to be looked at. The research study will also look at the role that the novel's representation of female empowerment plays in broader discussions about gender equality in modern Indian society. It will take into account the message of the book's consequences and its ability to inspire constructive social change.

This study uses a qualitative method and focuses on Chetan Bhagat's "One Indian Girl" through close reading and textual analysis. A thorough analysis of how gender inequality and female empowerment are portrayed in the work will be provided, supported by pertinent feminist ideas and critical viewpoints.

The entire book must be read in order to conduct a complete examination of the novel's major topics, character development, and narrative structure. To give a theoretical foundation for the analysis, the paper will refer to academic publications, academic literature, and feminist theories.

The research report will also take into account the author's background, goals, and any possible socio-cultural influences that may have influenced how gender dynamics are depicted in the book. This deeper contextual knowledge will help us analyse the novel's topics in more depth.

Gender Inequality in One Indian Girl

The novel calls attention to the problem of gender inequality in Indian culture. Due to her gender, the protagonist Radhika Mehta experiences discrimination and struggles in both her personal and professional life. The book explores the pressures placed on women, the unfair treatment they frequently experience, and their fight to reject conventional gender stereotypes. The protagonist of the tale is a young Indian woman named Radhika Mehta who works at Goldman Sachs in New York and struggles to balance her objectives for her job with societal norms. "Radhika when plans a date with Debu realizes the need to adorn herself for being a woman and finds it problematic even at the level of dress up. She compares the simplicity a man can present himself with, contrary to a woman indoctrinated by culture. Radhika needs to define herself as a woman through make-up and dress as Beauvoir perceives. To this issue Radhika says, 'Some problems in the world seem to exist solely for women, like not having anything to wear' [3]" "It seems to her that as if the whole responsibility of impressing the other sex is conferred upon the shoulders of women. In her conversation with the shopkeeper she replicates her mother's words sarcastically for herself, 'who will marry me with this skin colour?' Radhika says she had no clue for any other things except for textbooks; the things like waxing, short dress, boys and relations unlike other girls. First thing she displays as the problem is the way women are supposed to dress and taunted for the colour of their skin [4]. As Beauvoir opines-'Humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but a relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being [5].'"

The book discusses a variety of gender inequality issues, but it largely focuses on the difficulties women in Indian society experience. In the book, gender inequality is portrayed in several major ways, including the following:

1. **Double Standards:** When it comes to the expectations for women, the novel emphasises the pervasive double standards in Indian society. Radhika faces pressure from the community to uphold traditional gender roles and expectations while also facing criticism for her decisions.
2. **Career and Ambition:** "As cited in Indian J Psychiatry. Titled 'Adolescent sex education in India: Current perspectives', we find the ratio of female active participation is very less due to this growing gender biased culture present in Indian Societies no matter which religion or caste they belong [6]." "The complex emotional state in which youth find themselves in, stigma surrounding matters of a sexual nature in the Indian society and widespread gender crisis faced makes it increasingly challenging for adolescents to attain the knowledge they need. Through what is termed "family life education [7]" Radhika is presented as a driven individual who aspires to carve up a prosperous professional life. She does, however, encounter a number of challenges, such as job discrimination, prejudiced treatment, and societal expectations that put a woman's position as a wife and mother before her career objectives.
3. **Marriage and Relationships:** The focus placed on marriage in society and how it impacts women's freedom of choice are topics covered in this book. The issues experienced by many women in Indian society are reflected in Radhika's attempt to strike a balance between her personal wishes, expectations from her family, and social pressure to be married. Radhika agrees with her mother to marry Brijesh. She tells us about her own relationships It feels better and feels better for him, but all the other bitter truths about these relationships are still hidden. Radhika is in a complicated situation and has difficulty making his decision. That happens when Deb texts Radhika three years later. Radhika could have ignored it or not replied, but instead she replied and continued a series of conversations with him. She focuses on getting the message out to Deb. Even though she chooses not to check, she is distracted and unable to concentrate on Brijesh's words. This shows that she lied to Brijesh and reminds her readers that they may not like her because she will lie to her future husband. Things happen by chance as Radhika continues to do many things she could have resisted. She reveals the venue of her wedding to Deb, which puts her in even more trouble. Her confusion is compounded when Deb and Neil come to her wedding and wish her to marry one of them. Knowing what the two men had previously done to her, she ponders these thoughts and is troubled by so many conflicts that rush through her head [8].
4. **Education and Women's Empowerment:** The novel emphasises the significance of education as a tool for women's empowerment. Radhika's educational background and professional successes are weapons in the fight against gender inequity and societal standards. "Unless women are educated they will not be able to understand about their rights and their importance. Empowerment of women aims at striving towards acquiring higher literacy level and education, better health care for women and their children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights, improved standard of living and

to achieve self-reliance, self-confidence and self-respect among women ^[9].”

5. The book discusses the deeply ingrained patriarchal attitude that permeates Indian society. It illustrates how this mentality influences women's lives, choices, and chances, restricting their capacity for both personal and professional advancement.

While "One Indian Girl" presents a fictitious viewpoint on gender inequity, it illuminates the actual struggles that women in Indian society confront. Gender equality was not only the thing that Radhika demanded, many a time Radhika raises the topic of the difference between the colour complexions as she has whitish complexion and her elder sister, Aditi didi is fair. She asks why the people don't call the fair-complexioned people "rice-ish" ^[10]. The purpose of the book is to start discussions and raise awareness of the problems with gender inequality and the need for change.

Intersections of Love, Marriage and Identity:

Chetan Bhagat examines the intersections between gender and other facets of identity in "One Indian Girl," including class, caste, and education. The book acknowledges that overlapping aspects of a person's identity, as well as their gender, influence how they experience gender disparity and empowerment. This intersectionality is embodied by Radhika Mehta's character as she manages her many identities and the complications they bring. Her gender interacts with her upper-middle-class background, investment banking training, and caste privilege to shape her experiences and prospects. The story emphasises the various difficulties and advantages that people may encounter as a result of the intricate interactions between their identities by addressing these intersections. "Marriage is always hurdles in career. It is crucial issue in the life of girls. Marriage is socially mandatory but this compulsion if based on qualification then it quite more difficult. Let's see how it hampers the family life and happiness" ^[11].”

The story shows how Radhika's several identities influence her decisions and experiences. For instance, her class privilege gives her access to specific educational and professional options, but it also carries expectations that she will uphold conventional values and marry into a prosperous and reputable family. Traditional gender roles are challenged by her education and professional achievement, but they also increase the pressure on her to find a compatible partner and adhere to social norms. The book also explores the interplay of gender and caste. Although Radhika comes from a Brahmin family of higher caste, she occasionally runs into situations where caste preconceptions and biases are present. Her experiences become more complex as a result of intersectionality, which also highlights how social hierarchies and power are intertwined. "Girls inherit their mother's domestic chores and adopt stereotypical gender roles. Low self-esteem and self-worth are common. After marriage, her husband and in-laws control her life. Consequently, the girls enter a state of silence" ^[12].”

"One Indian Girl" emphasises that gender inequity must be examined within a larger societal context and cannot be understood in isolation through the examination of intersectionality. The book recognises that different social identities interact to shape people's experiences of empowerment and discrimination, and it invites readers to consider how privilege and disadvantage interact to shape opportunities and difficulties for individuals. The novel offers

a more nuanced view of the experiences of the protagonists and the more general dynamics of female inequality and empowerment by underlining the intersectionality of identity. It calls for a comprehensive strategy to overcome social inequities by urging readers to understand how gender discrimination is linked to other forms of oppression and privilege.

“In patriarchy, a woman's career or economic independence is liable to be used as a weapon to emotionally destabilize or harm her. Debu presents her career as a problem for their relationship, demanding that she left her work once she had kids. She confirms that her job will have nothing to do with her commitment as a mother". The book highlights the significance of identifying and combating the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression that influence people's lives via Radhika's journey. It challenges readers to consider cultural expectations and conventions that support inequality and to work towards a more equitable society that respects and values people's varied identities and life experiences" ^[13].

“This is a huge debating question that after marriage why only female have to do all the adjustments, sacrifices and compromises for the sake of family as it seems the responsibility of both the parents to be accountable for their domestic liabilities and family oriented responsibilities.”¹⁴ As observed by Archana Jain in Gender Attitudes And Marital Satisfaction Among Asian Indian Couples Living In The Exploratory Study That “In The Western World Exploratory as seen a shift from being a rite of passage that marked adulthood and helped organize social life to a partnership centered on two equal people who are bound centered Marriages are still being arranged by families and follow patriarchal gender roles" ^[15].”

In general, the novel's examination of intersectionality and identity deepens its portrayal of gender injustice and female empowerment. The story urges readers to critically explore the many elements of oppression and privilege and to envision a more inclusive and just society by recognising the complicated interplay of gender with other aspects of identity.

Female Empowerment

"One Indian Girl" discusses empowerment and identity. In a patriarchal society, Radhika has challenges relating to her identity as a strong, independent woman. As she challenges the current quo and works to assert her individuality, she goes through a process of self-discovery and empowerment throughout the novel.

“One Indian Girl” by Chetan Bhagat depicts themes of female empowerment while largely focusing on the difficulties experienced by women in Indian society. The protagonist, Radhika Mehta, embarks on a journey of self-realization and empowerment. The following are some examples of how the book portrays women's empowerment:

1. **Getting Rid of Stereotypes:** "Women have to go through various difficulties throughout their life. It starts with complexion that has to be fair for relatives and the society to accept us. Secondly a woman should not be earning more than a man because it hurts male ego. Thirdly a woman is expected to adjust throughout her life with her parents, with her husband, with her husband, with her in laws, with her kids, everywhere.”^[16] "Some problems in the world seem to exist solely for women" ^[17].” Every girl can face all these problems by making herself empowered. By pursuing a lucrative profession in finance, Radhika disproves conventional gender stereotypes. She proves that women can succeed in

demanding professions that have traditionally been controlled by males.

2. **Financial Independence:** Radhika is able to become financially independent thanks to her professional achievement. She may make decisions based on her own desires and aspirations thanks to this feature of empowerment, as opposed to depending on other people. When "Radhika's mother tries to persuade her for the marriage but Radhika is not ready for the marriage. Radhika mother is restless to know this. Modern woman is advanced in thinking pattern too. She doesn't want to be a traditional Woman of dependent on the income of her husband. She wants to earn more money for her growing needs. She is not ready to adjust for needs of money. She much is aware of her rights and identity of her own. Following discussion clears the identity crises of Radhika who is a careerist woman of modern age [18]."
3. **Self-Confidence and Assertiveness:** As the plot develops, Radhika gets more outspoken, defending her rights and speaking her mind. She develops the ability to speak out for her needs and wants, dispelling the stereotype that women should always be cooperative and meek.
4. **Questioning Society's Expectations:** "In India, violence within the home is universal across culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. Girls face violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles in their homes."¹⁹ Radhika examines such type of violence and the expectations that society has of women, particularly those that relate to marriage. She criticises the idea that marriage should be the ultimate aim for women and take precedence over their desire for a fulfilling profession and personal satisfaction.
5. **Embracing Individuality:** Radhika gains the ability to appreciate her individuality and distinctiveness: She rejects following social conventions and expectations in favour of forging her own path in accordance with her principles and goals.
6. **Empowerment and Education:** The novel places a strong emphasis on the value of education as a tool for empowering women. Because of her educational experience, Radhika has the information and abilities needed to deal with the obstacles she encounters and make wise judgements.

The book depicts instances of female empowerment while simultaneously acknowledging the difficulties and gender disparities that women confront. The book exhorts women to resist social standards, establish their independence, and work towards their own empowerment and happiness through Radhika's character.

Critique and Analysis of Gender Portrayal

"Abuse and violence against girls in the society may contribute to the development of dysfunctional behaviour, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, somatization disorders, etc. [20]." "Discrimination and neglect can result in lowered self-expectations, negative attitude toward self, lack of initiatives, and so on [21]." "Many a times on probing further, the symptoms can be conceptualized as exaggerations or stereotyping of female gender roles and sex-typed behaviors. It is also documented that girls tend to somatize and dissociate more owing to their status in authoritarian patriarchal society [22]." There have been mixed reviews of this novel's gender representation. The book makes an effort to address gender

inequity and empower women, but it has come under fire for offering a thinly veiled account of stereotypes and experiences exclusive to women. The investigation of gender issues, according to critics, may be shallow, lacking in complexity, and lacking in depth. The novel's emphasis on the viewpoint of a middle-class, educated, urban lady also ignores intersectional aspects of gender discrimination. "Chetan's Radhika is the true representative of today's generation who is somewhat scrutinizing by preconceived notions and pre-judgemental tendencies of our male dominating society which is neither completely western nor completely Indian and that becomes the major hurdle to cross for Indian girls [23]." The one-dimensionality of the male characters and the unrealistic nature of the book's denouement have also drawn criticism. To get a thorough understanding of gender dynamics in Indian society, it is crucial to take into account a variety of viewpoints.

Comparisons with Other Works

There are many novels or literary works that explore similar themes of gender inequality, female empowerment, and the challenges faced by women in society. Here are a few examples: Alice Walker novel "The Colour Purple" The early 20th century life of African-American lady Celie is examined in this Pulitzer Prize-winning book. It explores issues like domestic violence, gender inequity, and self-discovery. Similar to "One Indian Girl," it depicts a woman's journey towards empowerment and claiming her own identity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" This book, which takes place during the Nigerian-Biafran War, explores the struggles of war and patriarchy through the lives of different women. It talks about subjects including women's roles, gender inequity, and the fight for independence. Although the context is different from "One Indian Girl," it emphasises women's empowerment and the complexity of their experiences.

The lives of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila, are portrayed in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" by Khaled Hosseini against the backdrop of political unrest and the Taliban regime's brutal rule. It looks at issues including forced marriage, gender injustice, and resiliency. Similar to "One Indian Girl," it depicts the challenges and victories faced by women defying social norms. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "We Should All Be Feminists": This essay by Adichie, although not being a book, provides a stirring examination of gender discrimination and the significance of feminism. It talks on the need for gender equality, gender roles, and discrimination issues. Though it differs from "One Indian Girl," it nonetheless offers a provocative critique of gender dynamics.

Numerous viewpoints on gender inequity and female empowerment are presented in works like these and others. While "One Indian Girl" has an own storyline and method, comparing it to other literary works can help readers comprehend how various authors handle related issues and examine the nuances of women's experiences in society.

Conclusion

Subsequently "One Indian Girl" by Chetan Bhagat examines issues of gender inequity and female empowerment in Indian culture. The novel tells a tale that emphasises the difficulties women experience, particularly in juggling work goals, societal expectations, and personal needs. The main character, Radhika Mehta, is shown as a driven and aspirational woman who works hard to dispel gender norms and succeed in her

career. The book makes an effort to shine light on subjects including discrimination in the job, social pressure to fit in, and the effects of patriarchal views. It also emphasises how crucial financial security and education are as instruments for empowering women. The hardships that many women in Indian society have are reflected in Radhika's path of self-discovery and assertiveness. It emphasizes the struggle to balance career aspirations, societal expectations, and personal desires. While the book attempts to shed light on these issues and promote empowerment, it has faced criticism for its limited representation of women's experiences and reinforcement of certain stereotypes. Engaging with a variety of perspectives and works is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics. However, "One Indian Girl" has drawn criticism for how it portrays gender disparity and female empowerment. Some claim that the book only partially portrays the lives of women and doesn't adequately deal with the complicated issues of gender dynamics. Additionally, it has come under fire for perpetuating some stereotypes and offering a skewed perspective on gender issues. Engaging with a variety of viewpoints and literary works that address related topics is crucial to developing a thorough understanding of gender inequality and female empowerment. While "One Indian Girl" opens up a dialogue on gender issues, it is essential to investigate a wide range of perspectives and narratives in order to properly comprehend the complexities of gender dynamics in Indian society and beyond.

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