
GENDER EQUALITY IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S ONE INDIAN GIRL

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Gender is the quality of being male or female. Both are human beings bestowed with unique features. The physical features differ from male to female only to differentiate them, which is termed as sex. Equality refers to the condition of being equal i.e. sameness or evenness. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines gender as "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social, cultural differences, not difference in biology" (644). Over the years there has been many efforts taken to discuss the issue of gender equality in many countries. Gender equality prevails in every country, community, race, etc. Many organizations and communities have taken efforts to erase inequality. Nevertheless, it is prevailing still. The present society gradually changes its views on women who are working along with men. Equal positions are given to women in various public and private companies which had been hitherto a male dominated territory. Because of the efforts taken by civil rights movements and organizations, women's role at home, in work place and society has increased. This happens not only in developed countries but also in developing countries.

Gender inequality exists when people of all gender do not get equal rights and privileges. It refers to the

unequal treatment of people belonging to various genders. These differences are distinguished from biological factors. This misconception comes originally from the misunderstanding or the absence of understanding the position and role of each gender in life.

'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviour assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society; whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. It is decided by cultural, social, political and economic forces which influence social behaviour of men and women. The gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between a man and a woman. 'Sex' is a biological term whereas 'Gender' is a psychological and cultural term. It is widely held that while one's sex as a man or woman is determined by the anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender, of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is temperament and behaviour are largely, if not entirely, social constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization (Abrams and Harpham 101). Based on their sexual differences, gender is judged in accordance with the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men. As soon as when a child is born, families and society are eager to know the gender of the baby. In many countries, the birth of the son is applauded and daughter's birth is considered as pain and burden. The differences between both the sexes are created by society.

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Apart from differences in communities and society, there is a natural difference between the sexes based on biological and anatomic factors, most notably differing reproductive roles. Biological differences include chromosomes and hormonal differences. There is a natural difference also in the relative physical strengths of the sexes. The indicated differences are that men have larger lung volumes and more circulating blood cells and clotting factors than women who have more circulating white blood cells and produce antibodies faster. These are hypothesized to be an adaptation allowing for sexual specialization. This gender gap occurs in many factors and fields: in income or job, education, marriage, politics, household, etc. There is a pay gap between both the sexes. It manifests itself differently according to race, culture, politics, country and economic situation.

Gender inequality occurs in different countries in different faces. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rape and violence against women and girls is used as a tool of war. In Afghanistan, acid is thrown on the faces of girls for attending school. A Cambodian says: "Men are gold, women are white cloth." His statement signifies that women have a lower value and less importance compared to man.

India ranking remain slow in gender equality according to the World Economic Forum, although the rank has been improving in recent years. Gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue. Some argue that it talks about men in a wrong way. However, when India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantageous state. During the last fifty years, the views towards women have changed in every aspect. Women enjoy similar opportunities as men. Gender inequality is most commonly found at work place. Very often they refuse to pay fair or equal pay. In trading IT sector, women have to face many challenges. The glass ceiling effect is believed to be a reason for inequality against women. Glass ceiling effect refer to the invisible barriers that obstruct a women from rising to higher position in spite of having merits on the basis of education, ability and past-track records. Even women who work outside home and earn a good income are expected to spend time with children and complete the household works.

Writers like Meena Kandasamy, Kamala Das, Irom Sharmila, Laxshmi Narayan portrays a cross section of women. Incredibly the male writer Chetan Bhagat writes for the women and their inequality existing in India. Chetan Bhagat, the thirty-eight year old Engineer turned banker turned author, is celebrated by all the readers worldwide not only for his technical plot but also for his use of English language. His use of the language is understood by all. He mainly focuses on the reader/audience, mainly the college students who can easily buy this book for an enjoyable reading and to relish. He has so far written nine books including novels: *Five Point Someone*(2004), *One Night @ the Call-centre*(2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*(2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *What Young India Wants* (2012), *Half-Girlfriend* (2015), *Making India Awesome* (2015) and lastly *One Indian Girl*(2016).

His literary creations reflect the present existing scenario of India. Chetan always constantly tries to bring out the issues which are prevailing. He is one of the chart-topping novelists of the popular literature and a well known commercial fiction writer who excellently pens down the present world atmosphere exactly as it is. He is prolific writer who keeps an eye

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on each and every aspect of the society. His writings are full of facts and when he writes, readers get attached to it and he shows the true picture of India. His language is so simple and his thoughts are carved in such a skillful way that they are understood by everyone instantly. It has been one of the major reasons, why his writings have captured the minds of the younger generation.

He studied in well-known Army School in Delhi and he finished his undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Indian Institute, Delhi in 1995 and MBA degree from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmadabad in 1997. He worked as a Banker in Hong Kong. His experience as a Banker is narrated in his fiction *One Indian Girl*. Chetan dedicates this book "to all Indian girls who dare to dream and live life on their own terms." "And he thanks all the women's in his life."

Eminently, Chetan has interviewed many women in order to write this novel. Also, he also mentions the name alphabetically: Serbian DJ, the Indigo flight attendants, the hostel staff wherever he stayed; the various people he met at his motivational talks, his co-passenger son planes. He discusses the ladies he comes across. Radhika is the female lead. She tells that she is not good at taking decisions and cannot sleep quickly and she is going to get married in fifteen hours. Mostly brides want to get beauty sleep before marriage night but she is caring about how to get rid of the mess.

Radhika Mehta is a worker at the Distressed Debt Group of Goldman Sachs, an investment bank. She earns 2, 70,000 dollars a year. Converting to Indian currency she earns one crore and fifty lakh rupees. Radhika is an academic overachiever. She went to Delhi University's reputed Sriram College of Commerce and later to IIM-A, followed by a sterling career in New York. While her wedding season is going on, Radhika is contacted by her two former boyfriends, Debu and Neel. In New York, Radhika meets Debu and has a live-in relationship. He earns less than what she does. He feels insecure and he tells that Radhika is a career oriented girl but he wants a good mother to his kids. He walks out of the relationship and she decides to resign her job but her chief's adviseher to get transferred to Hong Kong.

In Hong-Kong, she meets Neel Gupta who leads the Distressed Debt Group of Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong. He is twenty years senior to Radhika; he is married and father of two kids. They both get attracted to each other and they have affairs. Soon she realises that this relationship holds no future. When she tells it to Neel that she wants to have a family and kids, Neel replies saying that homely things are not meant for career oriented girl like Radhika. She breaks the relationship and once again she wants to resign but her bank offers her a transfer to London.

Meanwhile, Radhika's mother wants her to get married and she agrees to marry Birjesh Gulati, who is working at Facebook in Menlo Park. The marriage programme is arranged in Goa. Debu and Neel appear in Goadetermined to marry Radhika. The pinnacle is whomshe is going to get marriedor whether she is going to quit everything.

The admirable novel delves into the wonderfully weird narrator Radhika. Often her alter ego 'mini-me' speaks throughout the novel, instead of a hero looking for professional and romantic fulfillment, Bhagat's new novel has a heroine who is looking for the same. Mostly women are forced to choose between work and home. Many Indian women sacrifice their work

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(ambition or sometimes the “most loveable job”) for the sake of their home. In this novel, many minor issues of women have been discussed: skin complexion, waxing, costumes, presentable looks, etc. The bride-to-be comments on her younger days and life with her elder sister: “Aditi didi started dieting from age twelve, and waxed her legs from age thirteen. I topped my class at age twelve, and won the Math Olympiad at age thirteen.” As Bhagat says that “this book is about an Indian girl who is intelligent and successful, because of which she finds difficult to get love.”

Four years before the wedding, in New York, through her batch mate Avinash she is introduced to Debu. They become friends and she likes Debu because he praises her intellectual caliber, costumes and sometimes about women and their freedom and studies. They live in together for two years like husband and wife. As Radhika insists him for legal marriage, Debu assures her that after he gets promotion he will marry her. When he gets promotion, Radhika celebrates it. When Radhika shares about her increment in her salary, he does not react. As the novelist describes it:

No. though you seem more interested in the menu than listening to me.’

‘No, no. Anyway. You were saying?’

I smiled. ‘That I had the highest bonus among the associates.’

‘That’s nice, babe. I mean, I can’t even imagine that kind of money. You know I barely reached 80,000 compensation even after the promotion’.

Why does he have to tell me his salary, no? I already knew it.

‘You are doing very well too’, I said. I regretted saying it the next instant.

Why did I have to add a reassuring and patronizing, ‘You are doing very well too’? As if telling a kid who is second in a race, ‘You ran well too’ (78-79)

Radhika expects a surprise reaction from Debu, but to the readers shock, there is no applause from Debu to Radhika as she expected. Instead, he compares his salary with her salary. And the conversation about her work starts when Debu is unable to attend the party in Radhika’s office. Debu asks Radhika whether she likes her job or not and goes on saying that when he first met Radhika, she is sweet, innocent and has a soft side. Debu brings in her bonus into their marriage discussion and Radhika asks:

If I were the sweet and innocent girl when you met, whatever that means, you were also the sweet boy who talked about feminism while we walked in Manhattan. Remember? *You will inspire other girls? Women need to show men they are no less? (95)*

Debu declares that if she cannot be affectionate to her kids and be a housewife to him she will not be his wife. And one day, he leaves a message for Radhika informing that he wants a simple Indian girl and leaves a share for house rent. The starting point of gender discrimination begins. Radhika decides to resign her most loveable job and goes on to see him but to her shock, Debu was with another girl in a bed. Radhika gets shocked and resigns her job but the bank offers her a transfer, she selects Hong Kong. Debu shares his bed with another girl as soon as he breaks up with Radhika. She feels betrayed and highly humiliated, and her sensibility as a woman not at all respected.

In Hong Kong, she meets Neel Gupta who is twenty years senior to her. He is friendly and looks handsome. At the second visit to Philippines, Radhika and Neel have a sexual affair in

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beach. When she feels that this relationship holds no future, she wants to break it up. Later she meets Kusum, wife of Neel, and his two kids too. She feels bad and by the way Neel says that he does not have any familial bondage with Kusum. He begins to hate his wife for the sake of Radhika. One day Neel comes up to Radhika's flat.

'You make marriage sounds 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?' (207)

Later she submits her resignation but Neel says that because of Radhika his bank gains some profits, therefore his bank does not want to lose Radhika. So he offers transfer. She chooses London with a condition that Neel should not meet her thereafter. Meanwhile, Radhika's mom tries to search a match for her without her knowledge. She posts requests online in her daughter's name:

Hi I am a young, slim, quite fair, Punjabi Khatri aged 26, 5'4" tall. I am currently working in London, but flexible to move anywhere with my husband, I am family-minded and don't mind staying in a joint family.

I can cook North Indian cuisine quite well. I have one elder sister who is already married and well-settled in Delhi. My parents have no other liabilities. My father retired from a respected position in State Bank of India and my mother is a housewife. We are well off and can do a high status wedding. (217)

So there are some rules in India for a bride to get married. Her mother hides Radhika's achievements and salary fearing bridegrooms might not bid high profile brides. Radhika loves her job more than her marriage. She and her mom shortlist some grooms. One Raj, who is a Doctor in USA, is silenced as Radhika refuses to say how much she earns, after Raj asks her thrice. The following dialogue between them proves how male society looks down upon women:

'Nothing ... Okay, I will tell you. This is not going to work. Your salary is too high.'

'How can you get too high a salary? I mean for me. I mean compared to me.' (224)

In an argument with her mom about the refusals, her mom even says to hide her the details of her job and salary. Radhika replies: "I can't hide who I am." Radhika recalls when she was in childhood what her father used to tell:

Beta, when you grow up, you can do whatever you want. The sky is the limit for you. Why do people tell girls all this? You ask them to achieve things, but when they do, you can't handle it. Why does it become? You are not even a girl anymore?

This question by Radhika is for the whole society to answer and especially for those who dominates. The issue regarding aborting a girl child is discussed by Bhagat:

'I heard you wanted to abort me.' I said.

'I heard the doctor goofed up on the sex determination test. He said it would be a boy'.

'We had Aditi. Your dadi wanted a boy'

Preference of boy child to girl child is what the society quite often expects. Eventually, Birjesh Gulati who works in Facebook as a system engineer in USA is fixed as a bridegroom for Radhika who finds him good and accepts him. They meet each other and decide to get

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married. So they plan a wedding destination at Goa. There she happens to unexpectedly meet both her former lovers Debu and Neel. As from the point, Debu gives the reason for his refusal when Radhika wants to marry him. As Debu counts:

'After you, I tried to be with several people. I dated other girls. Nobody connected with me like you did. Nobody had the complete package of qualities like you. You are smart, caring and humble....'

Radhika slaps him and questions him. 'My feminism didn't go anywhere.' My masculinity did. I told you, I felt insecure. How can my girl make three times as much as I do?'

'So what? I work in a bank. It pays better. You chose your passion, advertising. Why did you have to compare? Wasn't it all our money?' (119)

Debu realizes his blunder and decides to marry Radhika who is capable to live with him. She sends him out to hear what Neel to speak in: 'I am leaving Kusum. These are the documents' he said. Radhika remembers his kids and asks about them. Neel says that they plan to be co-parent. When Radhika refuses, Neel tells that he will marry her in the end and says he will settle the expenditures incurred for the wedding programme. Both Debu and Neel reveal their minds wait for Radhika's reply. Before the day of marriage, Radhika tells Birjesh that she no longer wants to marry Birjesh tries to convince her and request her to sleep well. That night some turning points occur.

Radhika messages to all three guys to meet her at coffee shop at 5 am for Debu and Neel, and 5:30 am for Birjesh. At the coffee shop, she introduces them to one another. Radhika questions Debu reminds him the conversation in New York where he said that women could and should fly but when it comes to real. Debu does not expect her volley of tirades. Her invective is: "In real life the girl throws a party for her guy's promotion but the guy cannot handle the girl's bonus, Yes?" She expresses her feelings to Debu by adding that when she started to fly, Debu wants to clip her wings. Turning to Neel, she blasts him saying: "You know what women really want? We don't want to choose. We want to fly and we *also* want a beautiful nest. We want both. Do male birds tell female birds to choose?" She gives them choice to choose between "sex or career." Radhika speaks for Kusum, who is the wife of Neel and says that even Radhika won't be younger for the rest of the life. So she asks both of them to get out of her life. At the time Birjesh joins them and she tells him about Debu and Neel, and she declares she cannot marry anybody and apologizes to Birjesh.

The people in the wedding hall is astounded by the announcement of Radhika that marriage will not take place. All the ladies curse Radhika and one of her aunts sardonically giggles saying that "this is what happens when they educate girls too much." A woman talking ill of a woman! It is worth remembering Birjesh statement who avers:

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.

Finally, she thanks Birjesh for supporting her when everyone curses her. Radhika takes a long vacation and flies across the world and one day after three months of Goa incident, she messages to Birjesh. Later they meet in Menlo Park. Birjesh praises Radhika for her bravery and the novel ends by both laughing together. Through the narrator, *One Indian Girl* explains why patriarchal thrives in India; not just because it is imposed by men, but because these

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societal rules and restrictions are internalized by women. On the other side, it is when Radhika seeks validation from her insecure boyfriend, who earns less than her, that the ugly scars of gender inequality are visible. The realization strikes again when the Goldman Sachs vice-president is told by her lover/married boss he does not want to see her as a “maternal” figure. Thus, both may look as a reciprocal but the inequality they give is the same. As a strong narrator, Radhika is unafraid to ask for what she wants in bed and when the time comes, she is able to pay for her own fancy destination wedding in Goa.

It is eventually the story of one woman's battle against insecurity, an insecurity that stems from growing up in an unequal society. Throughout the novel, Radhika's mini-me speaks and throughout the novel, Radhika spends too much time by groveling for attention and validation from her lovers and male bosses. At one point, she offers to quit her job to assuage her boyfriend's ego. “I wanted him, I was ready to be his girl, just the way he wanted to be”. But at the end Radhika has a romantic coffee date with “humanist Birjesh” (not a feminist).

This fiction is even more realistic because the background of the novel is Goldman Sachs and banker job profession. Chetan says in an interview that he was once in a banker profession in Goldman Sachs which paid him well and even he resigned it to write and to reach an author ambition as he says in *2 States*. As a writer, he wants to highlight issues in society that affect a lot of people. From the point of Bhagat, feminism is about equal rights. There is nothing fancy about it. It gets a little complicated because men and women want different things out of life. Their core drives and motivations are different and he even questions that he wants to stress the ridiculous choices that people want women to make all the time. He asks:

Do we easily permit women to have a successful career and be a great mother at home? Both could be core needs for a woman, but we often ask them to make a choice. We feel we have done our feminist duties by giving women the; freedom of choice'. Why should they have to make a choice? Do we ever ask men to make a choice between their core needs? I also feel we should understand the Indian women better and listen to what they want and what is feminism to them.

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