

‘What is a Woman?’**A gender study of Chetan Bhagat’s letter to Indian women****A.J. Glory Gursheth****M.A, MPhil Scholar****The American College****Madurai-2****Abstract**

Across the ages women have been considered as the objects of physical desire and oppression. Double marginalization of women takes within the community of women itself. The suppression of women by the male dominated society has been reflected from the ancient to the modern literature. The sufferings of women are never ending. Being in the position of the subaltern, women are never allowed to speak. Even if they speak they are not heard. This way of women being silenced, happens till date even in this techno-savvy world.

Introduction

The paper explores the rules that are framed for the women in Chetan Bhagat’s *‘Letter to Indian Women who Simply Melt their Heart’*. One important thing to be noticed is that, it does not take place overtly but in a subtle way, expressing the irony of the authors mind whose works deal with the postmodern condition of women in India. The author is genuine in expressing his suggestions to reduce the stress level of women. However, his comments unconsciously expose the way the visions of the women are misinterpreted in the patriarchal society.

The title of the research paper appears quizzical because instead of ‘Who is a woman?’ It is framed as ‘What is a Woman?’. The question of ‘What?’ is self explanatory that women are puppets in the hands of men. Women are like robots who act according to the rules of the patriarchal society. How a woman should act is decided by the male counterparts and that is

subtly portrayed in the Chetan Bhagat's letter. It also reflects upon the psychological fact that, these male dominated principles is injected within the women too. Finally women turn out to be enemies of women. To bring to light this issue, a man from the west is expected to give a report on the stress of Indian women, where as the Indian men turn deaf to the stress of their own female counterparts.

Hypothesis

This research paper explores the subtle male dominated themes such as:

1. Silencing the subaltern
2. The triple oppression of women in Indian society
3. Weak form of binary opposition between the self and the non-self

Background study

However educated or uneducated women are treated/tested with certain norms that define their existence on earth. In the postmodern era, women reach greater heights and hold various positions all over the world. On the contrary they also suffer from the unalterable work pressure and tension caused by their stressful jobs. Stress is universal for every human being. This study is meant to be more exploratory than explanatory.

Neilson makes a study of the working class women in India where 87% of women are stressed. He foregrounds the fact that even in work alcoholic America only 53% of women are stressed. In response to Neilson's report, Chetan Bhagat, the modern and the upcoming writer in India, published a letter to all Indian women titled as '*Letter to Indian Women who simply Melt their Heart*'. Some of the responses and the comments show the subtle male arrogance in the patriarchal society.

India, being a developing nation offers multiple jobs for women based on their education. Even though women hold high positions, they also need to take care of their husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law and their children. Such women were considered as the 'ideal wife' by the society. Only the privileged life is brought to light but the dark side is not brought to light. The dark side is the burdensome life of the women.

The standard of work determines the standard of a woman's life. Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Ripa Rashid wrote in Harvard Business Review on the international take on why Indian women are so stressed. She says:

'Women are the critical contributors in finance InfoTech, pharmaceutical research, and other industries that drives the growth of Indian Inc. Easing the stress that prevent them from reaching their full potential work is a smart way of the companies to attract and retain their key talent.'

Keeping women's career on track may not guarantee ongoing economic success but not doing so will surely limit it". Such is the power of the women in the modern world.

Silencing the subaltern

Women being the subaltern are devoid of speaking. Spivak says,

"The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with woman as pious representation has not withered away the female intellectual has a circumscribe task which she must not disown with a flourish" (Spivak 308). It is not that the subaltern cannot speak. If she speaks, she is not heard or she is misinterpreted. The silence of the subaltern women is the failure of interpretation and not failure of articulation.

Bhagat writes, *"If your boss doesn't value you-tell him or quit"*. The word 'Boss' expose the gender inequality that prevails in the Indian society. The idea that boss is associated with men is totally an oversimplified view of the patriarchal attitude. This is the point where the subalterns are not allowed to speak. Women shall speak but they are not heard, if they are not heard they are forced to 'quit'.

Even if a woman tries to overcome the shackles she would be branded by her own society as Kate was named as the 'Evil tongue' in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*.

Triple Oppression:

A domestic high breed male dog with the occidental names is valued much more than any other dogs from other parts of the world. This statement signifies the triple oppression of Indian women. Oppression is term that has become more synonymous with Indian women, especially the women of the third world countries. It takes places at three different levels such as sex, race and class.

A recent news from the newspaper states that a girl who was admitted in the hospital for treatment was molested by the male doctor and the male staff nurse. The patient was given anesthesia and sexually assaulted by the so called "educated elites". It is frightening that such vulgar men would not even leave the female bodies in the mortuaries too. If such is the worsening condition of India, which offers no security to Indian women, then Indian women would be the most stressful women on the whole universe. The ongoing sexual oppression of the Kashmiri women would not be cared by the writer who writes that *"Indian Women are the most beautiful in the world"*. (Chetan Bhagat)

This situation would be even worse for a women belonging to the lower class community in India, who along with the sexual oppression, is oppressed in the name of caste and class. This is the triple burden life of Indian women.

The cause behind the stress of Indian women is not only cooking the right meal for the family or getting a degree certificate by the husband. But it is more than that which men cannot understand.

Binary opposition

Chetan Bhagat says, "...don't ever think you are not without power". This sentence itself means that women are not powerful in raising their voices and they are devoid of it. Post Structuralism views that,

" Woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man; she is non-man, defective man, assigned chiefly the negative values in relation to the male first principle" (Terry 115).

Man is dependent on women. "Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as the no-thing (Terry115). This is suitable to the question that the writer raises, "*Can we imagine a life without ladies*"(Chetan Bhagat)

Since the 'self' male needs the 'other' women he glorifies and gives a beautiful picture of woman as they need to 'think' that they are powerful but not to act powerfully. this shows that man is dependant on and therefore the women is no longer the 'other' while she is as sign of something within man himself. It is the male dominant nature that excludes and subordinates women. If women were totally relegated from this earth there would not be existence of man, on deconstructing the binary division between the self and the other, women being the sign of an, offers power to men. Only if there is the presence of non-self then there can be the presence of self. The only reason why men think women are powerless is the 'ultra physical realm' that exists inside the thought of human beings.

The power of any women lies in the power of their ideologies and thinking. The 'ultra physical realm' should be reinforced to the idea that women are no longer powerless and belong to the self of the man. Such practices would replace women from the subaltern to the 'superaltern' position by deconstructing the binary division between the 'self' and the 'non-self'.

Saumyaa Vohra said, "...as an ardent feminist, I felt the need to break down this spiel, a piece by piece and expose it for the sexism steeped ball of condescension it actually is.."

She also says that this Bhagat's letter is '*the most stress inducing*'. On reading Bhagat's article, women regret that they are fixed by the men and they themselves provide suggestions to reduce stress level. It appears very ironic on the part of the writer. This is because psychologically a man cannot understand the stress of women. Similarly women cannot understand the stress level of

men. At this confronting situation, the suggestions of the writer to reduce the stress level of women appears non-sensual on the present scenario.

Ophelia, the most innocent women of the Shakespeare's characters is also the most stressed of all. She is considered to suffer from Posttraumatic stress disorder. The causes of posttraumatic stress disorder are genetic: women are more at risk than men. (Brewin 50) She says. "*And I of all ladies most deject and wretched*" shows that she has been played as a puppet in the hands of her father, brother and hamlet. The king notes:

First her father slain:

Net your son gone, and

He the most violent author

Of his own just remove

Poor Ophelia

Divided from herself and

Her fair judgment.

This is not only the condition of the past, but the condition of the present too. Modern Ophelia's are caught between the hands of men and suffer from the trauma that puts down the freedom of woman. 'Emancipation' is just a word in the Indian Constitution. Arshie Qureshi makes a powerful response to Chetan Bhagat's letter which states: "Emancipation is sadly looked upon by most of the 'intellectuals' as a commodity that you can make available for women." she makes powerful statements about the plight of Kashmiri woman who undergo the ripple oppression and sexual harrasement by the military forces. Through her article she enforces the fact that chetan Bhagat's suggestions in reducing the stress level of woman are in no way matched to the stress level of Kashmiri woman.

Conclusion:

The advancement of technology and the higher job positions cannot guarantee for the reduction of stress level of women. On the contrary it leads to increase in stress level. As times changes women ought to change themselves according to the advancement of the society by overpowering the traditional norms the struck them from empowering. Women should realize that they have power within themselves and in no way deprived of man. The way they voice out themselves should break the preconceived not of being silenced. The subaltern position should

change to 'superaltern' position by deconstructing the weak form of binary opposition. If only these practices from the past are changed, they could deconstruct the position of subaltern. Hence the above mentioned hypotheses stand partially validated.

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