

Portrayal of the 'Modern' Women in Chetan Bhagat's Novels

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Abstract

In the present 21st century we can find many writers who, through their writings, have been successful in projecting the existing social inequality, metropolitan life styles, luxurious and sophisticated life styles, westernized and urbanized influences, increased preference for convent education and have made their literary narratives sharper, chiseled, effortless and pitchy. The creativity and open minded influence have brought in the scope of research and stud of these writers. Chetan Bhagat is one of such contemporary writers who is famous for his liberal thoughts. His writings portray the emotions and feelings of the present generation especially the female characters in his novels. This present paper aims to focus on the major theme of equality, feminism and the changing trends of female thought process who are competitive, ambitious and tech savvy in the select novels of Chetan Bhagat. This paper will also discuss the concept of social reflection and concept of modernity and how through the delineation of the various characters he portrays the contemporary reality.

Keywords: 21st Century Women, Feminism, Individuality, Metropolitan Life Style. Contemporary Women.

CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

The term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman' (through French 'feminisme'). It believes that women are and should be treated as potential intellectual equals and also social equals to men. They have the same rights and power economically as men do. The term gained popularity from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women's suffrage for voting rights. Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Bhagat's writing is more feminine than masculine. He places prominence and elevates his female characters than the other male heroes. He has portrayed and expressed the feelings and emotions of the women. He believes in the equality of women and their prominence and influence in the lives of the men that are around them. Not only the women are competitive, ambitious and techno-savvy, the new generation women in Bhagat's fiction are fashionable and chic too. Chetan Bhagat's women characters keeping in mind the various types and phases of the women characters expressed in his novels are studied here and it tries to link these novels with the various phases of feminism. For this purpose, it is necessary to have some discussion of feminism and feminist literature. Feminism is indeed a serious attempt to analyse, comprehend and clarify.

DEPICTION OF IMAGES OF WOMEN IN INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The depiction of characters, Women characters in the novels of Indian writing in English is remarkably different to which Chetan Bhagat paints the picture of his female protagonists. Indian writers in English have been depicting in their novels, awful conditions of subjugation, desperate dependence and above all denial of domestic, social and economic freedom by men. But through Chetan's novels there is revolutionary breakthrough, or rather liberation of women of the 21st century where Chetan through his novels advises women to listen to their heart and life is short and has to be enjoyed. Mulk Raj Anand's presentation of images of women can be considered more pathetic. The image of Sohini, Bakra's sister, in 'Untouchable' Sohni is depicted as the pathetic symbol of oppression. She is depicted as a victim of caste exploitation as and sexual exploitation as a priest attempts to demoralize her during her daily chores in the temple. Though she is very beautiful, she does not have adequate clothes to protect her beauty from the hungry eyes of the male passers-by. So she becomes the victim of sexual exploitation. In 'Two Leaves and a Bud' Anand depicts the pathetic state of women characters under the colonial exploitation Sajani, Gangu, the hero's wife, who represents the fastidious village women who has been simply reduced as woman simply dedicated to cleaning, washing and cooking and cleaning again looking after her husband. Here women are picturised as just confined to the house and have no identity of their own. Hunt, the Assistant Plant Manager, tries to seduce Gangu's daughter, Leila, in the tea garden. She shouts and runs back to her hut. Hunt pursues her till her hut. He fires his revolver in the air. Gangu rushes to the spot and gets killed by Hunt. This is how the women have been depicted in the novels of the Indian writers in English in general. Such depiction of women since ages in the Indian Literature has somehow brought gloominess to the women of this world in reality. Women have been depicted as helpless victims of the circumstances where they cannot go against the system to safe guard their rights.

PORTRAYAL OF METROPOLITAN WOMEN

Bhagat regards life as more valuable than anything. For him enjoyment is not a temporary restraint in life from the daily chores. He sees and feels the triviality of the human life and he sees no sin in accepting what one thinks is good. We cannot see this with other writers Bhagat does not focus on the sufferings and helplessness of his characters in his novels but rather Bhagat manifests the untiring efforts of his characters to come out of the slough of melancholy. He portrays his women as the true revellers of the human life. Adversity does not stay with them for long. It does not subdue their will to enjoy life. They very soon emerge out of it and start delighting in the life. All the women characters of Chetan are intelligent and have the capacity to make their own choices and ready to accept challenges and risk no matter what their decision is. Chetan succeeds to make the young men and women openly accept the truths and realities and deal with it as a mutual need for the betterment of the society nullifying the aspect of hypocrisy. He advises the youth to follow their heart. Bhagat strongly emphasizes on the liberty of women. His woman characters believe in 'an absolute, a perfect, a pure and a noble freedom'. Hence, Bhagat has purposefully employed youth calling approach in his novels probably to bring some revolution and put an end to hypocrisy through his writing. He beautifully picturises the changing mind set of the women of metropolitan cities of the 21st century. In Bhagat's opinion girls are in no way inferior to boys, they are equal to them in all respective. He is an advocate to the liberation and empowerment of women.

WOMEN OF 21st CENTURY IN THE NOVELS OF CHETAN BHAGAT

Bhagat is an author, columnist, screenwriter and motivational speaker, known for English language dramedy novels about young urban middle-class Indians. He is the favourite of youth and has been identified as icon of the youth due to his contemporary thoughts. In his premier novel, *Five point someone*, Chetan beautifully picturises the relationship between Hari and Neha. She is smart, independent and individualistic. She has her own identity, dreams and goals. Neha herself offers ice-cream and invites to spend time with her, but Hari is too shy in approach towards women. Neha's character depicts that women in Bhagat's novels initiate fearlessly, they are bold and it shows that modern women don't wait for others consent and they aptly know what is best for themselves. In the classic fiction, *The Three Mistakes of My Life*, Vidya offers pizza to Govind and she takes him out on one or the other pretext. Vidya's character is portrayed as a woman of 21st century with a bold approach towards the relationships in her life be it Govind her mate and her maths tutor or her brother Ishan. She succeeds in convincing Govind that he loves her. She was the one who was bold enough to express her feelings and emotions towards Govind. Vidya's character in his novel displays that the women of 21st century are capable of doing things their own way without any regrets for the future. Her boldness in expressing her love for Govind led them towards a lifelong relationship.

In the novel, *One Night at The Call Center*, we can see Priyanka's as an intelligent and practical girl who is too preoccupied with her mother who played a key role in Priyanka's life. For her mother she breaks up with her boyfriend Shyam and marries her mother's choice an NRI named Ganesh. However, things turn out differently at the end and she chooses her ex-boyfriend over her mother's wishes for the sake of her own happiness. Here Priyanka's character is portrayed very boldly as a woman who can make her own choices even if it meant to go beyond the facades of the Indian society. Bhagat depicts his women emotionally strong through the character of Radhika Jha, in one night at the call center. She tries to adjust herself in an orthodox family against her wish but when she comes to know about her husband's infidelity she decides to leave and rather breaks free. There is lot of expression of freedom in the women of his novels. In Chetan Bhagat's novel, *Two States: The Story of My Marriage-Ananya Swaminathan*, who is a Tamilian Brahmin girl, unlike her orthodox family, is a girl of liberal thoughts. For her caste and cultural differences do not matter over her preferences. Ananya the woman of 21st century is ready to overcome cultural differences, pride and prejudices, diversities, age old traditions for the one she loves. Her character is that of a strong girl who has the capacity to heal her relations in her own way to achieve what she desires. Riya's character in Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* portrays an image of a very strong girlfriend. Riya's character depicts the contemporary era prevailing among youth that, to be successful you need to have a strong sense of oneself, because if you don't, you may get distracted by other people's perception, one has to be confident, have a clear vision of what one desires in life. Arthi's character in *Revolution 2020* (2011), is like any other girl in Chetan's creations. She is also in the quest for true love who can admire her and be with her. She loves Raghav her boyfriend deeply but she slowly starts drifting away from him as she understands that Raghav is too occupied and busy with his political career. She has Gopal as her suitor, who cares for her and spends a lot of time for her. She plays bold in realizing what is best for her. She finally chooses Gopal's love over Raghav's and decides to marry him. This shows her clear vision of what she wants her life to be and she very well knows that her choices have the power to shape her life.

CONCLUSION

Chetan Bhagat has shown expertise in handling the individuality of his women characters. By a thorough study of his novels we can understand that every female character displays strength and clarity of thought. Women of Chetan Bhagat are ready to face challenges and risks. He is a realist and creator of New society which lives freely. His women protagonists show the element of vitality. They boldly take initiation in the courtship. They speak their mind and they believe in confidence, clear vision, a perfect and a noble freedom. Bhagat, through his books, motivates the youth to lead their life according to their wish and inner self and not blindly follow the age old traditional concepts and thinking's transferred to the younger generations through ages.

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