
A Socio-psychological Study of Chetan Bhagat's Novel *One Indian Girl*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to study Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Indian Girl* from socio-psychological perspective to understand a paradigm shift in Indian Women's behaviour.

Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Indian Girl* presents a female's inner psyche - her desires and storm raging inside her mind and ready to erupt and explode at even the slightest prick. Radhika Mehta cogitates a city girl who is a strong supporter of feminist ideology but she has to confront the pre-decided norms of Indian society which have been set under patriarchal society due to which she undergoes various types of psychological pressures and agonies. This story is primarily about Radhika, the protagonist, showcasing the different aspects of a contemporary Indian woman. Radhika's social status affects society to such a large extent that she becomes an easy target of many known or unknown situations which aggravates her unfulfilled desires of not getting physical love and appreciation. Radhika's unfulfilled desires take their origin in the discrimination meted to her in her childhood and youth. It is a first-person narrative by the protagonist whose inner voice (named 'Mini-me') always expresses her inner emotions and the psychological conflicts going on in her mind.

This study shows that contemporary Indian Women are not emotionally weak, dependent, indecisive, and irresolute but tenacious, assertive, determined, aggressive, unconquerable and least concerned about any social norms and ethos. They have learnt not only to respond but also react too judiciously. This signals a radical transformation in Modern Indian Women.

Keywords

psychoanalysis, psychological conflicts, social construct, gender and colour discrimination.

1. Introduction:

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most read fiction writers in Indian Writing in English. His writings are labelled as representative of issues bothering young generation. He highlights the confusions, troubles and predicaments that the youth is facing in modern society. His works are famous for their themes like love, sex, marriage, politics and educational problems prevailing in India. He is also a columnist and, in his columns, he presents social, political, economic, ethical and educational problems of Indian middle-class society.

Naturally, an attempt has been made to study the novel, *One Indian Girl*, with a Socio-psychological view. Psychoanalysis in literature has been observed as a crucial practice to dig deep into the characters as well as happenings. Sigmund Freud is considered to be the founder of the theory of personality, which has three-tier structures, i.e., **id**, **ego**, and **superego**. **Id** is the impulse, unconscious part in the mind that is based on the desire to seek immediate contentment. It does not have a grip (control) on any form of reality or consequence.

The ego is responsible for creating a balance between pleasure and pain in order to maintain a realistic sense here on earth. It is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. **Ego** is aware that all the needs cannot be met at a given time. **Ego** operates the reality principle in order to satisfy the **id**'s demands as well as compromise according to reality.

Without **superego**, Freud believed people would act out with aggression and other immoral behaviour because the mind would not understand the difference between right and wrong. **Superego** provides yardsticks for separating wrong from the right as Freud believes:

“Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will, as we are now prepared to find, ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is mental, between the external world and the internal world.” (Freud & Riviera, 2011a)

These above-mentioned personalities propounded by Sigmund Freud can be viewed in Radhika which has developed due to the discrimination that she has faced in her life since her childhood, so it can be said that the societal role is clearly visible in forming Radhika's personality as Erik H. Erikson has explained in his book, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*:

“Only Psychoanalysis and social science together can eventually chart the course of individual's life in the setting of a changing community.” (Erikson, 1968a)

2. Purpose of the Study:

The study aims to analyze Chetan Bhagat's novel, *One Indian Girl* to understand the role and importance of society in framing protagonist's psyche reflected in her behaviour by applying Freud's personality theory of **id**, **ego** and **superego**. It also aims to examine customary gender discrimination on the basis of colour, education and gender and their impacts on human beings as well as society and community. Further, it attempts to discover if Modern Indian women are still an

object of different types of social and psychological exploitations or they have stated transforming into an altogether new woman who are getting firm, resolute, unyielding and

3. Literature Review:

Sigmund Freud (2011) presents prominent theories about personality structure and dynamics. Freud's study has a major role in reading one's personality. Besides, it justifies the individual's actions in the given environment and how the individual character can be in constant conflict.

Karen Horney (1992) describes anxiety as the product of unfeeling for the negligence of parents towards their child. It leads to moving either towards people or against people or away from people.

Erik H. Erikson (1968) deals with identity crisis of the adolescent. It is a severe problem among youth. Identity is the process that is located both in cores of the individual and in the communal culture.

Linda Alcoff (2021) shows that the external situation determines the person's relative position. It's possible to identify women by their position within the network of relations. Through social critique and analysis, we can identify women via their social network. The identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history.

Richa Tripathi (2017) shows that women want a judicious equality in society. Most of the practices of different cultures, traditions, communities, religions, and societies do not provide any choice or options to females in comparison to males and it is a very obvious guess which gender gets ignored or victimized a lot. Her paper raises the issue of deep-rooted an individual's personality. The individual's behaviour is heavily influenced by

unforgiving in their approach. In addition, it tries to explore if this transformation in Contemporary Indian women is fairly significant or just of a peripheral nature.

discrimination against women in India and so seeks equal human rights for women.

Thus, the body of literature has proved to be helpful in gathering insights into the socio-psychological realities of Indian women in general and Contemporary Indian Women in particular. The novelty of the research issue lies in the protagonist's of *One Indian Girl* continuous struggle for her identity, and her independence. Besides, it makes an in-depth study of her determination live a life of prestige and dignity. Further, it also investigates into the magnitude of transformation of Contemporary Indian women.

4. Research Design:

In this study, Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Indian Girl* was analyzed by using qualitative and analytical method. The researchers study discourse of the novel using socio-psychoanalytical approach. The study has been designed to investigate how the socio-psychological approach in the text can help to investigate Radhika's psychological conflicts, which are the result of traditional discrimination based on colour, gender, and socio-cultural environment.

5. Discussion and Findings

It is believed that social constructs (such as family, culture, income, and religion) and psychological factors (such as emotions, perceptions, and beliefs) play a significant role in shaping

the society, which instils societal values and social norms in him or her. As a result, the psyche is shaped by the social ethos.

The novel presents the continuous psychological conflict blended with feminist thoughts and desires which get triggered in various situations. The novel begins with Radhika Mehta, trying to settle down a sudden crisis of room allocation at Marriott Hotel in Goa where her family has landed for the first destination wedding in Mehta family, that is, of Radhika herself. She agrees to get married just because of her ever-grumbling mother. The decision to the wedding with Brijesh is her last attempt to have happy and satisfied life after two failures in relationships. In Goa, Radhika finds herself in a situation where she should be more concerned about her facial value as she is getting married within few days but she is found allocating rooms for the guests. This is where ideas clash in Indian society. A bride cannot allocate the rooms to guests in her marriage. Radhika, in the novel, has described herself that she has her own opinion on everything, and it can be seen right from the beginning. Radhika, can be seen as a feminist and a representative of women empowerment. She becomes agitated to hear the logic of 'girl's side' and 'boy's side' in which the 'girl's side' has to adjust and it would be a kind of crime if the 'boy's side' is told to be adjusted. She does not want to compromise with the less number of the rooms for the 'girl's side' whereas her mother and Kamla bua adjusted all the guests of 'girl's side' in a fewer number of rooms using "complex algorithm with criteria like the people sharing the rooms should not hate each other (mixed gender rooms were avoided even if it involved people aged eighty plus)" (4) and somehow 50 rooms were kept aside for the 'boy's side'.

Radhika doesn't want to be dolled up for the 'boy's side', but all goes in vain when an Indian mother shows her emotional side. Though she doesn't want to be dressed up, she has to do so; though she doesn't want to get married to a guy she hardly knows, she is going to do so. This is the Indian social construct; where a girl has to do so many things that she doesn't want to do willingly. Radhika, despite being the Vice President at one of the topmost banks, has to kneel down in front of the demands of society. She loses weight, becomes slim, and goes on diets, just to look beautiful at her wedding.

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 wheatish complexion and her elder sister, Aditi didi is fair. She asks why the people don't call the fair-complexioned people "rice-ish" (7). She refers herself to the girl shown in fairness cream before using the cream and her sister, the one after using the cream. Radhika had been a very intelligent student but when it comes to popularity, she was not popular like her Aditi didi who was fair and started dieting at the age of 12 only. Aditi won the title of Miss Hotness at a farewell whereas Radhika faces pranks and becomes a topic of laughter.

It's not only the literature that one can get reference resembling black Madonna in Christian iconography and Shakespeare's Othello but this distinction has been deeply ingrained in Indian society and somewhere in the Indian psyche too where we can observe the cases of colour discrimination even among the family members. Bhagat has very nicely presented this in his work. The instances like- "you should also get married soon" (8) and "The younger the better. Especially for someone like you" (8) said by Aditi didi are

perfect examples of colour discrimination prevailing in society where a girl having 'wheatish' complexion should get married soon with anybody. Moreover, Radhika has been symbolized here as a strong and intelligent girl who completes her studies and gets a job on day zero and gets an offer to work in Goldman Sachs, New York. Instead of listening to her sister and getting married, she chooses her own way, simultaneously the thought of looking beautiful occupies Radhika's mind and as a result of it Radhika can be seen as the one who waxed to look beautiful in order to be noticed and loved by Debu, and this is true even when she is dating Neel. She seemed to be aware of her appearance. Initially, Debu compliments Radhika on a regular basis, which makes her happy, and she interprets these compliments as a hint of intimacy. Radhika's secret impulses are revealed by Mini-me to the readers. This indicates that Radhika is eager to become acquainted with Debu. She is unconcerned about the repercussions of her impulses, as well as their legal and moral implications. Her ego-ideal keeps her from taking the initiative. Radhika's being independent is not the end; actually, this is the beginning of so many conflicts of thoughts. As she announces her salary to her mother, instead of showing her happiness her statement was "How will I ever find a boy for you?"(9) and "who wants to marry a girl who earns so much?" Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has rightly pointed out the mindset of people about girls in his essay, ***We Should All Be Feminists***:

"And then we do a much greater disservice to girls, because we raise them to cater to the fragile egos of males. We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We

say to girls: You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful but not too successful; otherwise you will threaten the man. If you are the breadwinner in your relationship, with a man, pretend that you are not, especially in public, otherwise you will emasculate him." (Adichie, 2014)

Radhika gets Distressed Debt along with her colleagues- Carl and Mark. They agree to it within a while whereas Radhika thinks before accepting it. She asserts that girls think several times before accepting any opportunity whereas boys accept it instantly with confidence. At first, Radhika informs Debu about Distressed Debt. Debu acknowledges her and encouraged her. Radhika wants to get closer with Debu but as per the pre-determined rules, Debu should have first moved towards it. Moreover, Radhika "had to pretend to be innocent" (50). She wants to attract him without letting him know about it. "A part of me wanted to scream, Oh Debu, just kiss me" (51) but "a lifetime of brainwashing to be a 'good Indian girl' would never allow me to do that" (51). The **id** in Radhika wants to get intimate with Debu but the **ego** inside her wouldn't allow her to do so. Sigmund Freud rightly delineates in his book, ***The Ego and the Id***:

"The ego has the task of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality-principle for the pleasure-principle which reigns supreme in the id. In the ego perception plays the part which in the id devolves upon instinct. The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions." (Freud & Riviera, 2011b)

Debu makes her feel good by praising her and saying that she has better features than her sister and agrees with the subject of feminism; he points out a book by Naomi Wolf in which it has been discussed about the system where “women are culturally bullied into feeling conscious about their looks all the time” (55). Later on, due to the behavior of Debu as well as Neel, the same girl comes to know about the hypocritical nature and superiority of a male who considers his opposite gender as worthless and feeble.

Over the course of time, Radhika and Debu fall in love and start living together. On the other side, Radhika’s mother kept on pressurizing her for the marriage. In India, society makes an issue of an unmarried girl and talks about the delay in the marriage. Radhika also wants it someday to happen; not with anyone but with Debu. Her mother seems to be the representative of an Indian society who always narrates the Do’s and Don’ts of the society. She points out the job of Radhika which makes girls work so late at night. People in India don’t consider it morally right if a girl works late at night. Radhika offers her parents to switch the car to which her mother says, “With sons it is different. It’s like your right” (67). People feel bad to take financial support from daughters. These words agitate Radhika. In anxiety, after the arguments with her mother, she demands the confirmation of her future from Debu. To which he does not show any interest. She observes a change in Debu. Radhika plans a surprise for Debu to get a promotion whereas Debu does not even praise Radhika sufficiently at her getting a big number in bonus rather than he focuses on the tenderness of lamb. He often compares his salary with Radhika’s which makes her feel terrible at the time when she actually wants a

fair degree of acknowledgment from her partner. Debu does not think of her as a potential mother. Debu wants his wife to be at home and look after the kids. He wants Radhika to be sweet and innocent which according to her is to be “docile and submissive” (97). Somehow all his words seem to be an excuse to leave her. Finally, Debu deserts her. Radhika decides to quit her job and reaches to Debu’s place to inform him about her decision but her agony increases when she finds Debu sleeping with a white girl. It clearly shows that Debu has no soft feelings towards Radhika. He only wanted sexual fulfillment with her, as he had with several other girls earlier. Naturally, Radhika’s love and emotions towards Debu seem to be only a waste.

Every corner of Manhattan reminds her of the time spent with Debu. She decides to leave the place. Deep within she wants him to come and stop her even after so many betrayals. To forget the pain given by Debu, Radhika shifts to Hong Kong. But this does not make a great change in her life rather she falls in another relationship with Neel Gupta, a successful business partner at Goldman Sachs who is twenty years older than her and has been already married to Kusum and has two children. Knowing this, that Neel is already married, Radhika puts effort to look beautiful to attract Neel. Mini-me reminds her of his being married. Out of the blue, they get intimate at Philippines Island. Radhika already had a premonition that something is about to happen there but Radhika does not move away as she wants it to happen. Radhika compares the lovemaking of Neel with Debu- “If Debu was French fries, this was a gourmet six-course meal. If Debu was beer, this was champagne. If Debu was a boat, this was a

luxury cruise” (180). Their affair prolongs which makes Radhika feel lonely and when Radhika meets Kusum, she thinks of herself who has stolen her husband and at the same time calls herself Neel’s mistress. She feels guilty for her deed. Her conscious mind strikes her to make her realize that she is in a slip-up which cannot be repaired but knowingly she involves in a relationship with Neel and is not able to look into the consequences of her actions. The dynamics of guilt consciousness has been elaborated well by Erik H. Erikson (1968) in his landmark book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*:

She meets Neel’s children and assumes that someday she would also become a mother. Despite her keen interest in getting married and have kids someday, Neel misinterprets her again just like Debu, and does not consider her a maternal type and boldly remarks, “I don’t know if you were even meant to be a mother” (209). Both the men in her life screwed her and used her only for sexual gratification. After Radhika leaves Neel, she shifts to London, but again she connects everything with Neel and wishes him to contact her. Mini-me keeps on chattering and analyzing the things which took place around her. Mind- conscious or unconscious - is always ready to justify the deeds.

Apart from these confusions and chaos in her life, she loves to be with her mother. Moreover, their mental level doesn’t match. Then also she puts effort to make her mother happy by listing grooms for her wedding. Her mother designs the profile of Radhika for a matrimonial site listing all the qualities of a good wife and mentions her “quite fair” (217). This makes Radhika irritated. This is the outlook of Indian society where a dark-complexioned boy also desires a fair girl. That’s why Radhika’s mother adds all the

“In our guilt-culture, as a consequence, there occur not only individual regressions to early guilt feelings and atonements, but also reactionary returns to the content and form of historically earlier and stricter principles of behavior. Where a group’s socioeconomic status is in danger, the implicit moral code becomes more restricted, more magic, more exclusive, and more intolerant, as though an outer danger had to be treated as an inner one.” (Erikson, 1968b)

points which qualify Radhika as eligible for an ideal Indian matrimonial. Radhika goes through several thoughts while selecting a groom. She, being a feminist, wants her man to earn more than her so that man’s manliness doesn’t get affected or hurt as she has already observed the reaction of Debu when she announced her bonus to him. Debu did not want his woman to earn more which can be observed by his repeated comments on Radhika’s earnings. Here, Debu represents the male community of our society who thinks that a female partner should not earn more than her man. Finally, after several deliberations, Radhika along with her mother makes a mutual agreement to marry Brijesh. She reveals about her relationships to him and feels better but still hides all other bitter truths of those relationships.

Radhika finds herself in complicated circumstances where she faces difficulty in taking decisions. It arises when Debu texts Radhika after three years which could have been ignored by Radhika or should not have replied to it but instead of doing so, she replies back and had a good number of conversations with him. She focuses on messaging Debu. She gets distracted even though she decides

not to check it due to which she can't focus on Brijesh's words. This makes her acquaint with the lie to Brijesh and reminds the readers that they might not like her as she is talking lies to her husband-to-be. Things accidentally happen where Radhika keeps on doing so many things which she could have resisted doing. She reveals the wedding place to Debu which makes her fall into a more complicated situation.

Her bafflement augments as Debu and Neel arrive at her wedding and want her to marry either of them. Knowing the behavior of both the men that they had done to her before, she gives those ideas thought and lets her suffer from so many conflicts which flood her mind. Karen Horney, rightly perceives in her ***Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis***:

“When conflicts center about the primary issues of life, it is all the more difficult to face them and resolve them.”
(Horney, 2001a)

She often lies to Brijesh to hide the circumstances that she is suffering through and confesses that women lie about their feelings all the time. Finally, Radhika comes to a decision and makes both of them realize their mistakes. She states that men always want women to choose between their career and home. She explains the reason that why it is difficult to have both together because both the timings have been decided by men irrespective of the inconvenience faced by women. She also makes it simple and straightforward that as men cannot choose between career and sex, a woman cannot choose either “to fly” or “to nest”. They want both. She emerges as a clear-headed person who is capable of telling all about her

relationships to Brijesh. After a long duration of anarchy and confusion in her life, she comes to a strong decision not to marry anyone at all. She rejects the system of getting wedded which has been set up by the patriarchal society; her decision leads to the disappointment of all the family members but she takes this step for herself. She does not want any conflict in her mind and comes out with a strong decision as mentioned by Karen Horney in ***Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis***:

“Finally, to make a decision presupposes the willingness and capacity to assume responsibility for it. This would include the risk of making a wrong decision and the willingness to bear the consequences without blaming others for them. It would involve feeling, “This is my choice, my doing,” and presupposes more inner strength and independence than most people apparently have nowadays.” (Horney, 2001b)

Among all the men, only Brijesh seems to be a true feminist to which he calls humanist. Radhika admires him for his support in her decision.

6. Conclusion:

The paper reveals the life of Radhika and the complexities of her psyche as she gradually shrivels from existence which lets her escape from the reality and find solace by involving in relationships. In the end, Radhika finds her way to lead a peaceful life. She comes out of her confused state of mind and understands her existence. She becomes determined,

aggressive, unconquerable and least concerned about any social norms and ethos. She knows what is to be chosen to make herself happy irrespective of the demands of society. Thus, *One Indian Girl* becomes a tale that raises

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