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Research Article

From Personal Experience to Social Reality: Autofiction and Faction in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl

Priya Sachdev [1*], Dr. Deepika Agrawal [2]

[1] PhD Scholar, SAM Global University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

[2] Associate Professor, Department of English, SAM Global University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: * Priya Sachdev

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat's novel One Indian Girl is an Indian English novel which explores, through the character of Radhika Mehta, contemporary issues such as gender discrimination, personal desires, professional aspirations, socio-cultural expectations, relationships, inner conflict, etc. The paper critically examines the novel through the new literary concepts of Autofiction and Faction. Autofiction provides an opportunity to analyse the relation between the author's real-life experiences, everyday observations, his thought process and narrative voice in novel, while Faction highlights how the author represents social concerns through the created events and situations. The paper examines how Radhika's life mirrors the conflict between modern aspirations and traditional values. It also explores how a professionally successful woman struggles with double standards imposed on her by society, the challenges to balance the personal and professional life and the pressure she bears to become a perfect bride as per the existing social norms. The paper also evaluates the narrative and linguistic styles along with limitations and how relationships and marriage affect urban, privileged professional women. The study concludes that the novel One Indian Girl opens a new literary space to discuss various social issues that are often not surfaced and the complexities of Indian womanhood. Also, it finds that Autofiction and Faction are perfect literary perspectives to examine how fiction can engage with the author's lived experiences and social realities without becoming a perfect autobiography or factual account.

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INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat published a novel, "*One Indian Girl*", in 2016. It is a contemporary Indian English novel that deals with gender roles, aspirations, emotions, love, marriage, relationships and challenges faced by a professional woman in Indian society. The lead character of the novel is Radhika Mehta. She is so ambitious, financially independent and professionally successful, but simultaneously she struggles to balance her personal desires and social expectations. Chetan Bhagat has tried to examine the contradiction between modern and traditional values through the story of Radhika. Therefore, his novel provides a very significant base to analyse it through new literary concepts: Auto fiction and faction. Both the concepts explore the relation between the author's real-life experiences, contemporary Indian social situations and imaginary settings of the novel.

The term Autofiction is made up of two terms: 'auto', i.e., 'self', and 'fiction', i.e., 'story'. Thus, it combines elements of the author's self with fictional settings. There is a blurred boundary between real events and imaginations.

On the other hand, 'faction' is also made up of two terms: facts (real) and fiction (imagination). Thus, it blends facts with imaginative settings. It represents real-life situations / data through fictional characters and events. Although *One Indian Girl*, preliminarily, is a story of a working Indian woman, we can trace the author's real-life experiences and actual social facts in the life of Radhika.

Thus, it provides a suitable background for critical discussion of aforesaid new literary trends.

Summary

The novel begins with the marriage preparations of Radhika and Brijesh. Radhika is an international investment banker, working at Goldman Sachs. She is financially independent, expresses her opinions clearly and straightforwardly, and is professionally well-established but simultaneously bears the pressure of marriage from family. Moreover, she struggles with her relationships due to double standards set by her partners - Debu and then Neel.

Debu wants Radhika to quit the job after marriage and become a conventional Indian married woman and take care of her children and parents. Neel, on the other hand, has an extramarital affair with Radhika, but he doesn't want to marry her. In this way, neither relationship provides emotional security and personal fulfilment she seeks. Finally, her family chooses Brijesh as her prospective groom, but Radhika is not mentally prepared, so she denies marrying Brijesh and wants to take time to make any decision.

Hence, the novel reveals how a professionally successful woman experiences difficulties maintaining personal aspirations while meeting social expectations. It represents how Indian society celebrates the success of an Indian woman, simultaneously expecting that she should also develop herself as per traditional social values.

Throughout the story, we can also find discussions between Radhika and Mini-me (her inner voice), which show internal conflicts, anxieties and social fear of Indian women. It represents that professional success doesn't protect an Indian woman from social criticism and pressure to conform to traditional ideas of femininity.

Thus, this novel explores dreams, profession, emotions and feminism through the perspective of a woman. In this way it provides an appropriate base for study of social facts and lived experiences within fiction.

Auto fiction in One Indian Girl

As mentioned earlier, autofiction blends the author's real-life experiences with fictional elements. As we know, a conventional autobiography narrates the author's life, but an autofiction narrates an imaginative story while potentially mentioning the author's real memories and experiences. Since Radhika is a female character, it cannot be said that Radhika represents Bhagat (a male author) himself, but still, we can trace multiple similarities in their lives.

Like Radhika, Bhagat was also working as an investment banker in Goldmann Sachs. Both face the same professional competitive environment. Further, we can identify the inner conflict of Radhika with the author's personal confession. Readers feel that Bhagat is directly sharing his opinions, thoughts, aspirations and desires. This interactive narrative style gives an impression that an actual person is talking to them. Moreover, like Radhika, Chetan Bhagat also is outspoken. She says:

"I have an opinion on everything."

Similarly, Bhagat shares his thoughts and opinions on various issues without any fear on various digital platforms. Therefore, *One Indian Girl* can be examined through auto fictional techniques.

Faction in One Indian Girl

As mentioned earlier, faction merges facts within imaginary situations. As we understand, a conventional factual account doesn't require any real character for representation of facts, whereas a faction incorporates real circumstances, historical situations and everyday experiences into fictional settings. This base is appropriate to analyse the novel through new concepts or literary perspectives. Although Radhika and her multiple relationships are purely fictional narratives, various issues she deals with are so true for contemporary Indian society, such as gender biasedness, patriarchy, prevailing illogical social norms, etc. She is very successful by profession, but still as a bride she is not acceptable. There are different standards in Indian society to judge a man and a woman. For instance, she says:

"Why do people tell girls all this? You ask them to achieve things, but when they do, you can't handle it."

This excerpt shows how Indian society has double standards. Thus, Radhika represents growing independence for women in Indian society as well as simultaneously persisting patriarchal expectations. The novel also represents changing attitudes of Indian women towards education, careers, marriage and relationships and social encouragement for their success while maintaining traditional values that continue to pressurise them

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for marriage and to become a perfectly suitable bride. This contradiction is showing that different values, traditional as well as modern, can co-exist and create internal chaos. The following excerpt mirrors the inner dilemma of a working woman:

"Some people are good at taking decisions. I am not one of them."

Through *One Indian Girl*, Bhagat has not provided a survey of Indian women's lives; in fact, he has tried to surface the true situations through the story of Radhika so that readers can reflect on it. Since Radhika belongs to a relatively privileged class, her life doesn't represent the experiences of rural women, poor women, non-working women, etc. They all face different challenges. In this way, the novel is not a comprehensive factual account.

Critical Evaluation:

One of the novel's strengths is its simple and easy language and conversational style. The first-person narration enables readers to clearly understand the inner conflicts of women. It also builds a strong bond between the reader and the text so that the reader can relate the story to real-life situations. They can examine how women enjoy formal independence and struggle with social pressure that limits their choices. Once she says:

"We don't want to choose between career and home. We want to fly, and we also want a beautiful nest. We want both."

This excerpt shows how conventional norms limit women's aspirations. The novel has certain limitations also, as its focus lies on marriage and relationships. Thus, it doesn't explore the whole experience of a woman. Moreover, Radhika's elite class experience does not represent various Indian women who belong to different backgrounds.

Thus, it can also be felt that Chetan Bhagat has tried to simplify complex issues of womanhood through mere personal relationships.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *One Indian Girl* is a mirror of contemporary Indian society, where individual freedom, gender expectations, ambitions, and emotional conflicts all exist together. Through the character of Radhika, Bhagat has portrayed several social realities, such as the clash between individuality and social expectations, the struggles of modern Indian working women, mismatched expectations of marriage and relationships, etc.

The concepts of Autofiction and Faction provide different ‘;asdftyu ertyy tyuiop []\ v perspectives to interpret the relation between realism and imagination. Autofiction helps readers to trace authorial presence within fictional narrative, although it is not established that *One Indian Girl* is author's autobiography. Similarly, a faction allows readers to find real social concerns in a created story.

In view of the above, it can be established that the novel can encourage discussion on severe social issues such as patriarchy, gender biasedness, youth aspirations, changing attitudes, etc. without becoming a typical factual account. Its significance lies in the fact that it can stimulate discussion on hidden and camouflaged issues of contemporary Indian society.

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About the Author

Priya Sachdev is a PhD Scholar at SAM Global University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Her academic interests include research, scholarly writing, and interdisciplinary studies. She is dedicated to academic excellence and knowledge development through research, critical analysis, and contributions to her respective field of study.

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