

# Narrative Techniques in Chetan Bhagats Novel One Indian Girl, December 2016

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## Abstract

In the modern day fiction writing, Chetan Bhagat has acquired great popularity in popular fiction genre. With the publication of *Five Point Someone* Chetan Bhagat continues to make an impression on the readers. His themes generally revolve around the aspirations and problems faced by the youth. He is recognized as a youth icon and in his recent novel he addresses the problems faced by *One Indian Girl* in making her choices. Here in this novel, Chetan Bhagat is successful in narrating the story of a girl in a female's voice for the first time. The first person narration is done by the young ambitious girl named Radhika Mehta.

Here in this paper I make an attempt to bring the narrative strategy used by Chetan Bhagat with reference to globalization, media culture and feminism. By breaking the stereotypes of the patriarchal society, Bhagat narrates to us the ambitions and experiences of a young woman in her professional and personal life.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Female Narrative, Narrative Techniques, Marketing, Publishing Industry



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The first person female narration is Chetan Bhagat's first attempt to analyze the issues of a woman in *One Indian Girl*. The narrative techniques that I try to explain are writing styles and the narratives. The marketing strategies by a writer and publishing house play an important role in the success of popular fiction. The success of a popular fiction is determined by the number of copies sold. This demands strategies that include use of theme, marketing, advertisement. The advertisements and promotion through social media are the parts of these strategies. The books by Chetan Bhagat looks driven by the market and promoted by the media influence. The critical perceptions of the book hardly affect the commercial success of some popular fiction. Chetan Bhagat entertains his audience and writes formulaic fiction. In this paper I will try and analyze these attempts the writer makes to formulate *One Indian Girl*.

Chetan Bhagat is a popular fiction writer. His novels are bestsellers, received greatly by readers. The media praised him as a great novelist. "International Herald Tribune" calls 'Bhagat has touched a nerve with the young Indian readers and acquired almost cult status'.<sup>1</sup> "The Hindu" praises him as 'Chetan is also responsible for a seismic shift in Indian writing in English'.<sup>2</sup> He works as a columnist for leading English and Hindi newspapers. He focuses on youth and their issues in his novels. He has a huge fan following, as

<sup>1</sup> Chetan Bhagat. *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT* (New Delhi: Rupa,2011) ii

<sup>2</sup> Chetan Bhagat. *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT* (New Delhi: Rupa,2011) ii

he makes the best use of social media. The writer's audience is the middle class Indian youth.<sup>3</sup> His novels are *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ The Call Center* (2005), *The Three Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *Two States: The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014) and *One Indian Girl* (2016). His non-fiction works include *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015).

Chetan Bhagat claims in one of his books that he writes to make people read. He tries this by using simple and colloquial language in his novels. His stories are plain, straight forward. He writes characters which are flat and allegorical. His novels came in a time when the media culture and corporate culture was finding changes. The internet provided a new means of acquiring knowledge; the new technology helped the commercialization and commodification of novels. The new novels needed marketing strategy in this period of technology. Chetan Bhagat makes the best use of these advantages of technology to craft his works a bestseller. Though he has a great fan following, he feels that the critics find his works very shallow. The critics find his works shallow for the commercialization and formulaic nature of his novels.<sup>4</sup>

Chetan Bhagat employs new ways of marketing strategies with every release of his books. Releasing of teaser for a book release is a new approach to advertisement in this book. The advertisement printed on the front page of a daily and his use of social media are other techniques that show clever marketing. These techniques have resulted in the raise of popularity of his books. These new tools used in reaching the audience; in turn has made an impact on the reading habits of the people.

In order to break the stereotypes of the patriarchal society, Chetan Bhagat remarks sarcastically in the blurb of the book *One Indian Girl*. Thus,

Hi, I am Radhika Mehta and I am getting married this week. I work at Goldman Sachs, an investment bank. Thank you for reading my story. However, let me warn you, You may not like me too much. One, I make a lot of money.

Two, I have an opinion on everything.

Three, I have had a boyfriend before. Okay, maybe two.

Now if I was a guy, you would be okay with all of this. But since I am a girl, these three things don't really make me too likeable, do they?<sup>5</sup>

The facts in the blurb make people to raise questions, these kinds of situations raises in the novel time and again. The reason that a girl is rich, is a problem for the parents in finding a match. The girl has an opinion of her own and this leads to tough situation from other characters. The society never expects her to be in a relationship either. These things are anyhow acceptable with a boy but with a girl it makes the eyebrow rise. With these points in the blurb, Chetan Bhagat hints that he narrates the story about a girl who is different.

The novel explains how an Indian girl can gain her social status with her intelligence and reach great heights in her career. The book gives us the idea that a successful woman needs no one to describe her, but need someone to support her in her endeavors. This story looks interesting not just because of its theme but because of its unique narrative style. The whole story is presented to us by the first person narration of

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<sup>3</sup>Velmani, N. "Revolutionising the Youth: A Study of Chetan Bhagat's Novels." *RSIRJLE* (Gwalior: Vol 4 Issue 1. Feb 2016)

<<http://www.researchscholar.co.in/downloads/8-dr.-n.-velmani.pdf>> web.

<sup>4</sup> Anjaria Ulka. "Chetan bhagat and the new provincialism" *American Book Review*. (Vol 36. number 6. Sept/Oct 2015 )pp.6-22.

<sup>5</sup> Chetan Bhagat. *One Indian Girl*, (New Delhi: Rupa and Co. 2016)

Radhika Mehta. She is a twenty seven years old successful Vice President in an investment banking firm called Goldman Sachs.

The story is presented to the readers in flashback technique; Radhika narrates her story of the present and narrates her past in three phases. She is introduced to us only in the seventh page of the novel, till then the description of her marriage ceremony is described as a setting to the story. The first few pages give us the details of the lavish destination wedding in Goa.

Brijesh Gulati, a character in the novel is the bridegroom who is to marry Radhika Mehta. He tells Radhika about equal opportunities to women and defines feminism as follows, Feminism is a movement that seeks to define, establish and achieve equal political, economical, cultural, personal and social rights for women. A feminist is someone who believes in this movement.

The character Brijesh being very empathetic, understands the equal opportunities and rights expected by Radhika. *One Indian Girl* foregrounds many conflicts between prejudices of patriarchal society and democratic thinking of a female character. Whether the book is a debate of female perspectives or the feministic approach is a question here. Female narration is not necessarily called feminist perspective.

Image of *One Indian Girl*, is another issue that needs close attention. Who is this girl the author wants to represent? Is she a girl from a very poor, rural background? Or is she a girl who is nerdy, good in her studies? She is a girl who makes a lot of money and from the city. She goes to places which are dreamlands for young people such as London, New York, Hong Kong. Bhagat uses characters like Radhika to project some images of women in his novels. There is a difference between the One Girl of the novel to everyone else in India. There is another idea of Indian Girl here. Can we conclude that a girl born in India is an Indian girl? Is Radhika Mehta represents Indian girls? Do Indian girls want to be independent and become as ambitious as Radhika? The answer to these questions is that there is an element of fantasy in the novel. These elements are present in the other novels of Chetan Bhagat too. Neha in *Five Point Someone*, Priyanka and Esha in *One Night @ the Call Center* are the similar to Radhika, they are learned and from cities. Vidya in *Three Mistakes of My Life*, Ananya in *Two States* and Riya in *Half Girlfriend* the similarly planned characters. All the characters, themes and the narratives of chetan bhagat seems to have influenced by the politics of reception.

The major theme in *One Indian Girl* includes shedding light to issues which are particular to women and has not been recognized by the society. These issues are related to the opportunities that a woman gets and how she is treated by the society. According to the presuppositions of the patriarchal society, a girl who is more educated, who earns more and more intelligent faces problems in getting married. These themes are shown while discussing why a woman is made to choose between work and home, her obsession with fair skin.

Chitrallekha Manohar criticizes the novel *One Indian Girl* as formulaic. In the literary review of *The Hindu* he identifies that the novel is about a successful woman who is suffering from insecurity. It is identified as a story where the central premise of the novel is formulaic where an immensely successful woman suffers from insecurity. This feeling of insecurity is because of the reason that the men chose her whereas she wanted to keep her choice open. She needed to make her choice in choosing her life partner. The reason that they selected her is the main issue here.<sup>6</sup> The debate here is the availability of the difference between

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<sup>6</sup> Chitrallekha manohar in “ A Script for Bollywood “ *The Hindu* (October 22, 2016.)<[www.thehindu.com/books/literaryreview/A-Script-for-Bollywood/article16077803.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/books/literaryreview/A-Script-for-Bollywood/article16077803.ece)>

woman's perspective and feminist narrative. Everything felt by a woman may be considered woman's perspective but may not be necessarily feministic narrative. Feminism has a sociopolitical history of hundreds of years and it cannot be limited to a woman's perspective alone.

Bhagat has tried to voice the woman's narrative, for doing this he claims to have interviewed hundreds of women and learned about their voices, dreams and wishes. Showcasing these aspirations and dreams of a woman in general, it feels that Bhagat had tried to include a lot of disharmony in the novel. The criticism about the book is that it is only a woman's perspective. This in turn resulted in ignoring the view point of other characters.

In an interview Chetan Bhagat answers the questions about the book that., "This book is an opportunity to bring out their issues to the forefront, the writing about woman's issues is not a monopoly to be enjoyed by accredited feminists alone. It need not always be espoused in boring intellectual pieces either."<sup>7</sup>

Chetan Bhagat feels that he should write accordingly to the views of his readers. His intention is to reach his audience "A writer's first job is to strike a chord, and not to please elitist circles," by this he means that He does it by caring for his readers and listening to them," It can't be just the language, as it is simply the common language of the people. It is more about what is being said and communicated that strikes a chord." Chetan strongly believes that the language should be colloquial- a popular fiction has to be a dialogue with the people on the streets.<sup>8</sup>

Chetan bhagat's use of adjectives for the feminist critics and belittling feminism is nothing but a true marketing strategy. The writer uses themes that has currency and uses it to impress the readers. The main objective of any publishing house is to make use of the current theme to make it commercially beneficial. The non availability of critical acclaim to the popular art is a long debated argument. The writer is not happy with the way his works are received by the critics. He is sure to address the intention of making his works a sure success by his marketing strategy. In an interview he defends that a true marketing strategy is one where people never know that it is a marketing strategy. The writer's discontent towards not getting good critical acclaim turns him to pass judgment on the "accredited" feminists and critics.

Prasum Bannerjee attempts to analyse Chetan Bhagat's works as choreographed narrative. He explains in his essay It is the better understanding of the nature of the "culture industry" that made Bhagat shift from the chiefly romantic or the strongly feministic, the crudely comic and slapstick forms of the fictions of the 90's, and switch to issues, relatively more relevant and concerning the new generation. As for the narrative, bhagat resorts to the thriller and the fantastic form. But wherever may be the issue, bhagat only knew very well, it has to be well packaged for the product to sell as, as a new generation is too much conscious of the brand value of product and how much it offers in a package.<sup>9</sup>

Chetan Bhagat is an intelligent writer to make use of the current themes and finds success in projecting these narratives in his novels. His recent attempt *One Indian Girl* is a well tried effort to bring the inner

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<sup>7</sup> "Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl" Interview with Chetan Bhagat. *Ultra.news* <<https://ultra.news/s-e/21164/chetan-bhagats-one-indian-girl-sex-feminism>>web.

<sup>8</sup> Ashwani Rana. "'Problems and Aspirations of Youth" As Highlighted in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat." *International Journal on Arts, Management and Humanities* (27 .2013): 66-72.

<sup>9</sup> Prasum Bannerjee "the choreographed narrative: recontextualising the narrative strategies in chetan Bhagat's Fiction". "The Criterion"

voices of an ambitious girl. The story is narrated well but considering it as a feministic approach to literature is a tricky and puzzling.

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