

A Literary Analysis of Postfeminist Culture and Global Connections in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl

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ABSTRACT

Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl* stands as a compelling text that warrants closer examination in the context of contemporary literature and feminist discourse. This research article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the novel, with a particular focus on its representation of postfeminist culture and its intricate intersections with global connections. The study employs a multifaceted approach, incorporating textual analysis, feminist literary theory, and cultural studies to scrutinize the protagonist's journey and choices. It delves into the complexities of postfeminism in the Indian context, investigating how the character's experiences, aspirations, and dilemmas mirror the evolving landscape of gender roles and identity in contemporary India.

Furthermore, the research also explores the global dimensions of the novel, elucidating how the protagonist's transnational experiences shape her perception of self and gender dynamics. It investigates how globalization, migration, and multicultural encounters influence her agency, identity, and empowerment. This facet of the analysis uncovers the intricate interplay between the local and the global in shaping the character's life choices and worldview. This study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on postfeminism, globalization, and literature by offering a nuanced examination of *One Indian Girl*. The research investigates the novel's resonance with contemporary issues, cultural sensibilities, and transnational narratives, ultimately revealing the rich complexities that lie within its pages.

Keywords: Postfeminism, Globalization, Gender Roles, Transnational Experiences, Global Connections.

INTRODUCTION

Female characters are often portrayed as successful women with the freedom to choose their lifestyles, as exemplified in the novel *One Indian Girl*. This novel exhibit chick-lit features through depicting a careerist woman enjoys a thriving profession, independence, and style, yet continually seeks relationship stability. From an artistic perspective, chick-lit might be clearly considers as a form of fictional women shaped by physical, charisma, spectators, story line, etc. In the sense of Chen (2012), feminine personality in chick-lit often make choices oriented towards consumer pleasure and solipsistic individualism, deviating from the ideals of feminist collectivism and social change.

In this study, we focus on the novel *One Indian Girl*, authored by Chetan Bhagat in 2015. The novel delves into the life of Radhika Mehta, the primary character. Radhika grows up in a Punjabi family, portraying the quintessential middle-class Indian family. The novel depicts Radhika as a nerdy child, consistently excelling in her academic pursuits. After completing her education, she secures a position at the prominent debt-distressed bank, Goldman Sachs. The career path of Radhika takes her to the United States as well as she is later moved to the same branch offices in various parts of the globe, including Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The novel vividly showcase Radhika as an independent, intelligent, and respected professional in all the branches of Goldman Sachs.

The primary objective of this research is twofold. First, we aim to detect the portrayal of postfeminist sensibilities present in the select work. The method scrutinizes postfeminism as a topic of the present study as well as it critically examining the notions and addresses the mutual sense of postfeminism, which can often appear paradoxical. These contradictions manifest as the simultaneous celebration of "girl power" and female success alongside intense scrutiny and criticism of womanhood in the civic sense. Any lasting gender disparities and conflicts are explained as the result of accepted changes or individuality of women (Gill, 2017).

Second focus of this research is to define the way of postfeminism is expressed beyond the Western context, given that the novel is Indian chick-lit and deeply rooted in contextual of the Indian culture. This tactic method is known as transnational postfeminism, which was projected by Simidele Dosekun. Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of understanding how postfeminism emerges beyond Western boundaries, with a specific focus on its meanings, effects, target subjects, transnational connections, local contexts, and interactions with other transnational as well as resident cultural constructions.

Dosekun (2015) argues that postfeminism has been transnationalized rather than solely belonging to Western culture. Rather than unquestionably adopting the Western concept of postfeminism, thinking of postfeminism transnationally entails recognizing it as a thoughtful and hypothetical declaration towards the factors such as globalization, neoliberalism, and their cultural complexities. This study aims to uncover the way of postfeminist culture is portrayed in the life of Radhika as an Indian girl, using the novel's social and cultural references as a guide. Transnational postfeminism, therefore, seeks to explore how postfeminist culture has emerged outside the Western world and its various connectivities, as well as its localization.

As outlined in the paper by Rosalind Gill, et al (2017), this formulation enables the de-anchoring of postfeminism from a rigorous historical view, emphasizing postfeminism as a dynamic constellation of beliefs, ideas, and practices that evolve and travel. A previous study that articulates postfeminist sensibility and its connection to local values and practices is *Shanghai Babies*.

The examination of postfeminism as sensibilities in *One Indian Girl* is projected to shed light on how Radhika's style of life is shaped by postfeminist culture, with connections to feminism, antifeminism, and neoliberalism. Furthermore, the inclusion of the transnational postfeminism perspective is intended to elucidate in what way postfeminist culture depicted in the writing and how its impact the Radhika's social and cultural background in Indian context.

Research Analysis

The analysis reveals that *One Indian Girl* embodies postfeminism as sensibilities and can be categorized under the five core notions. These notions include femininity, the body as a source of power, an emphasis on individualization, choice, and empowerment, a shift from objectification to subjectification, an emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring, self-discipline, and the dominance of the makeover paradigm. Each of these elements is discussed below.

The novel portrays Radhika's desire to conform to certain beauty standards, highlighting the cultural influence on women's self-surveillance, as emphasized in media culture. Radhika's quest for beauty includes the desire for hairless skin and other beauty norms perpetuated by societal expectations.

One key moment in the novel occurs when Radhika encounters Amanda, her colleague's girlfriend. Amanda, who works in the entertainment industry as an actor and part-time piano teacher, embodies the media's portrayal of the ideal woman. With her striking looks, gorgeous hair, and bold makeup, Amanda is the epitome of how the media dictates women's appearances. Radhika finds herself comparing her own appearance to Amanda's: "I wanted to be Amanda. I do not know why...hoping to get her a drink" (Bhagat, 2016, p. 67)

Radhika's internal conflict stems from her perception that her attractiveness, as defined by societal standards, is in her physical appearance rather than her career achievements. Despite being an intelligent, accomplished, and ethical individual working for Goldman Sachs, Radhika's persistent dissatisfaction with her own appearance reflects the pervasive influence of beauty ideals.

Furthermore, Radhika's yearning to resemble Amanda underscores the sexualization culture, particularly the equation of physical attractiveness with being perceived as "sexy." The novel demonstrates how Radhika values praise for her physical appearance over other achievements. When a colleague, Debu, compliments her sense of style and her legs, Radhika's response reveals her preference for compliments regarding her physical appearance: "That's when Debu said something, something even better than the amazing things he had said about my work and intelligence...Your whole personality, actually". (Bhagat, 2016, p. 40)

In *One Indian Girl*, the portrayal of Radhika's body image struggles and the significance she attaches to physical appearance serves as a compelling illustration of the postfeminist notion that the body is a crucial source of power. The novel highlights the impact of media culture and societal beauty standards on women's self-esteem, emphasizing the focus on physical appearance and the desire to conform to these ideals. Additionally, it illustrates the narrative of women seeking validation and happiness through their physical attributes, reflecting the complex interplay between self-identity, societal expectations, and postfeminist sensibilities.

The novel demonstrates how Radhika grapples with a contradiction between pre-feminist values and postfeminist ideals. On one hand, Radhika acknowledges her achievements in her career, but on the other, she believes that physical appearance is the paramount factor in defining attractiveness.

In the novel, Radhika emerges as an independent woman who seeks to make her own choices and focus on her self-development. The notion of individualization is central to postfeminism, advocating a focus on self rather than being swayed by external factors such as political and cultural pressures. In postfeminist culture, modernized femininity centers on pleasing oneself rather than conforming to traditional notions of objectification.

The culture of postfeminism portrays women celebrating assertive female sexual pleasure and embracing a glamorous, cosmopolitan lifestyle filled with conspicuous consumption. This portrayal aligns with Radhika's character. The term "choice" at the core of postfeminism culture, however, is not immune to critique. It tends to overshadow women's concerns related to patriarchal structures, particularly when women prioritize personal lifestyle choices over political and societal stances.

Radhika's choice to wax her legs, while seen as an act of self-liberation, falls into the discourse of self-regulation in the pursuit of beauty. The consumption of beauty products becomes a solution to address women's perceived flaws, contributing to the idea that they must conform to the same ideals of physical attractiveness, heterosexual relationships, and sexiness promoted by patriarchy and capitalism.

Postfeminism as sensibilities reveals the inherent contradiction in viewing women as subject to neoliberalism through the lens of "choice." Women, who seemingly take full responsibility for their lives, paradoxically find themselves striving for the same beauty standards. The idea that "all women are doing it," as Radhika encounters from the waxing lady, perpetuates the pressure to conform to societal beauty norms.

Living in a modern, metropolitan environment, Radhika has become highly independent and individualized. She feels that she should be the one deciding her life's path because she relies solely on herself. In the novel, Radhika endeavors to redefine herself, breaking free from her image of being unfashionable and nerdy. The context of high modernity presents individuals with ontological insecurity and prompts a reflexive self-identity, described as the project of the self and individualization.

This tension highlights the paradoxical nature of female empowerment, often conflicting with the desire for men to maintain traditional power dynamics. "It's not that easy. What kind of blatant capitalism is this? ...I rolled my eyes". (Bhagat, 2016, p.73). In this context, Debu questions Radhika's choice to work in a demanding field, suggesting that her job represents blatant capitalism. Radhika's interactions with these male characters emphasize the recurring challenge women face when trying to assert their choices in relationships. Instead of offering support, the male characters mock, criticize, and belittle their female counterparts. They expect women to use their "feminine" attributes to emotionally mend any male distress, which often leaves women feeling responsible and guilty.

Despite the empowerment celebrated by postfeminism, women's agency is continually subject to instability, and heteronormative power dynamics often challenge their accrued value. "I am not. Okay, I like you...Do you get it?" (Bhagat, 2016, p.75). When discussing the role of motherhood, the emphasis on "choice" aligns with neoliberal values of autonomy and adaptability. The "choice" promotes the idea that women can reinvent themselves and be "good" mothers despite challenging circumstances. This notion mirrors self-surveillance, a central postfeminist concept. In this context, Radhika affirms her commitment to being both a career woman and a nurturing mother, emphasizing that her career will not hinder her ability to be an effective mother.

Self-surveillance, monitoring, and self-discipline are prominent features of contemporary society. These behaviors are not solely innate but are also shaped by media culture. The desire to be "better" than one currently is forms the core of postfeminism culture, where femininity is often regarded as a bodily property, and the pursuit of self-improvement plays a central role.

The interaction between Radhika and Amanda serves as an example of the interconnectedness between

self-surveillance, media influence, and the notion of feminine attractiveness. The novel depicts a moment when Radhika meets Amanda, who is Craig's girlfriend. This encounter takes place at an office party where employees are allowed to bring their significant others. Amanda's appearance is described in striking terms, emphasizing her beauty and her adherence to Western beauty standards. "Amanda is here... oxblood lipstick and smokey eyes." (Bhagat, 2016, p.67). From makeup to wardrobe choices, women are expected to engage in meticulous self-presentation and continuous self-assessment to meet societal beauty standards. Amanda's image, in this context, represents the "ideal" woman as perpetuated by the media.

Such media representations have the potential to create personal insecurities and self-criticism in other women, as evident in Radhika's inner monologue when she compares herself to Amanda. "I wanted to be Amanda. I do not know why... \$270,000 a year. But, Amanda is so hot..." (Bhagat, 2016, p. 67). This example illustrates how media influences women's self-monitoring behaviors and leads them to analyze their perceived flaws. Consequently, women may feel compelled to engage in self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline to conform to societal beauty ideals, further emphasizing the impact of media on these behaviors in postfeminism culture.

Radhika's struggle to find the perfect outfit for a social event illustrates the stress that self-surveillance can generate in women's lives. Her frustration at not having anything to wear highlights the self-imposed pressure to feel attractive, as seen through her perspective. "Some problems in the world seem to exist solely for women. Like not having anything to wear. I realized I had nothing nice for tonight." (Bhagat, 2016, p. 27)

As a result, Radhika may engage in consumerism by purchasing beauty products and fashion items to enhance her attractiveness. These features, representing mediated self-surveillance, indicate how self-surveillance is intertwined with neoliberalism, with women often feeling like the subjects of neoliberal ideals. Women, as Radhika suggests, are disproportionately burdened by societal expectations, perpetuating self-transformative behaviors and a constant need to work on their bodies.

Self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline are integral aspects of postfeminism culture, closely linked to media influence, body image, and peer surveillance. This cultural sensibility is entangled with feminist concerns, reflecting the complex relationship between feminism and postfeminism. It also underscores the role of neoliberalism in shaping women's perceptions of themselves, leading to stress and self-transformation in the pursuit of attractiveness.

After meeting Indian friends in New York, Radhika develops an interest in Debu, who initially flirts with her. This encounter sparks a desire in Radhika to impress Debu during their subsequent meeting. She meticulously prepares herself, including waxing and dressing in a manner that makes her feel attractive and confident. Radhika emphasizes that these efforts are for her own self-satisfaction rather than for the sole purpose of gaining Debu's attention. However, it is evident that Debu is drawn to Radhika's appearance, highlighting the shift from objectification to subjectification. Radhika is no longer passively objectified by the male gaze; instead, she actively chooses to present herself in a way that aligns with her desires.

In this context, Radhika's desire to appear attractive to Debu is a representation of her active role in seeking his admiration. This reflects Goldman's (1992) assertion that women are no longer presented solely as passive objects but as active participants who choose to present themselves in an objectified manner. As she notes: "Okay, I had a challenge bigger than distressed debt tonight...he had been steered" (Bhagat, 2016, p. 39)

Radhika's concerns about possible sexual activities exemplify how postfeminist sensibilities present modernized femininity. The key distinction lies in the concepts of "choice" and "independence," which challenge the woman's position as an object but also acknowledge her active role in determining how she is perceived. This notion also encompasses the concept of "the technology of sexiness" (Radner, 1993), which centers on sexual knowledge and practice. Another instance in the novel occurs when Radhika and Neel Gupta prepare to go jogging together on the beach before having dinner. Radhika is quite attracted to Neel, who is kind, polite, hardworking, and has an athletic body.

In summary, Radhika is portrayed as a young heterosexual woman who actively utilizes her sexual power to create situations that align with her desires. Postfeminist sensibilities emphasize the contemporary representation of women in popular culture as active, desiring sexual subjects, rather than passive objects as seen in the past. Women are depicted as knowledgeable and willing participants in their objectification, exemplified by Radhika's role in the novel.

Radhika, for instance, has long viewed herself as a nerdy and unfashionable individual. In essence, she

perceives herself as less attractive, prompting her to take deliberate steps to enhance her self-image. Her efforts to transform her appearance include a desire for a new hairstyle and a visit to a salon for a haircut: "I had lied to Avinash...me at a salon on 32nd Street" (Bhagat, 2016, p.27)

Furthermore, consumer culture is intricately linked with neoliberalism, particularly when it pertains to targeting women. Going to a salon and seeking beauty treatments are akin to consumer activities, aligning with the neoliberal agenda that encourages individuals to be self-regulating, ultimately benefiting the market economy (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The central tenet of neoliberalism is personal choice, which closely aligns with the core theme of contemporary postfeminist culture. Women are often encouraged to be self-autonomous in determining various aspects of their lives, as illustrated in the novel when Radhika chooses to undergo a style transformation, shedding her nerdy image. This transformation invariably involves the consumption of beauty and fashion products.

The Indian chick-lit novel *One Indian Girl* encapsulates the quintessential features of global chick-lit, distinguished by its incorporation of cultural references and themes. The narrative primarily revolves around rhetorical dilemmas, relationship conflicts, and family dynamics. Beyond these cultural references, the novel vividly portrays Radhika's lifestyle, embodying female subjectivity and the influence of neoliberalism.

This narrative, woven with cultural insights, is a reflection of transnational culture critique (Ponzanesi, 2014) that showcases how India introduces unique patterns derived from Anglo-American chick-lit. One aspect of transnational critique within non-Western chick-lit involves how female characters pursuing urban lives reconcile with the enduring family traditions rooted in cultural norms. Living away from India has afforded Radhika limited access to these traditional requirements. However, when she returns to India for her wedding to Brijesh Gulati, she is drawn back into the intricate web of her cultural heritage, as marriage holds profound significance.

Moreover, donning traditional attire and exhibiting decorum serves a broader purpose beyond personal attraction. It symbolizes the wearer's social status (Lindridge and Dibb, 2003), signifying property and wealth to distinguish one's social standing. India, with its strong collectivist values and emphasis on group identity, tightly binds individual self-identity with the family's image. Therefore, how women present themselves, their behavior, and their attire carry significance in defining their identity and reflecting positively on their families. In essence, for Indian women, clothing and behavior are instrumental in elevating not only their personal identity but also their family's social standing.

Applying the transnational postfeminism perspective allows us to view postfeminism as a commodity that transcends borders. Postfeminism products are readily available beyond the Western world, exemplified by the widespread popularity of Brazilian waxing, extending from Mexico to Shanghai (Dosekun, 2015). The crucial determinant in accessing postfeminist products lies in an individual's capital. In this regard, Radhika's social background and familial status afford her access to postfeminist commodities, even while she resides in India.

According to Fernandes (2000), the new Indian middle class derives its distinctiveness from its ability to contribute to the economic market through consumer culture. This new middle class encompasses diverse groups, such as wealthy farmers, labor elite, small business entrepreneurs, professionals, overseas workers in the Gulf region, and various salaried employees from diverse backgrounds (Fernandes, 2000).

This novel exemplifies how Radhika's social background facilitates her access to postfeminist culture commodities while dwelling in India. It underscores how her cultural milieu shapes her adherence to family traditions and her evolving relationships with parents who have different perspectives. It provides insights into the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity, the challenges faced by single women, the dynamics of family and society, and the daily struggles of women related to household issues, careers, love, and friendships within the unique Indian context. In conclusion, Indian chick-lit, exemplified by this novel, serves as an apt illustration of how local cultural dynamics and class factors interplay in the realm of postfeminist transnational critique, significantly influencing the embodiment of postfeminist culture within Radhika's life.

Conclusion

The sensibilities found within the narrative encompass femininity as a bodily property, a focus on individualization, choice, and empowerment, the transition from objectification to subjectification, an emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring, and self-discipline, and the prominence of the renovation pattern. In summation, Radhika is portrayed as a character who believes in having choices in various aspects of her life, including her physical appearance, career, and relationships. Nevertheless, the contradiction emerges when her choices coexist

with self-surveillance, as she frequently corrects herself and perpetually seeks to enhance her attractiveness. Consequently, her choices lead to the consumption of beauty products, from fashion to salon treatments, highlighting the entanglement of these choices with neoliberalism, as they ultimately benefit the economic market.

The analysis employed a transnational postfeminism perspective. The findings and discussions indicate the postfeminist culture portrayed in the select work is pointedly prejudiced through the cultural and financial condition of the protagonist. Radhika, being an Indian, endeavors to align her choices with her family's expectations due to India's strong collective culture, which places great emphasis on family values. Moreover, her middle-class Indian upbringing and financial stability provide her with the means to access and engage with postfeminist commodities. This approach underscores the influence of social and cultural factors on the manifestation of postfeminist culture and extends the discussion of postfeminism beyond Western contexts.

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