

## **Feministic Perspectives in Chetan Bhagat Novels ‘Five Point Someone’ And ‘Two States: The Story of My Marriage’**

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**Abstract:** Chetan Bhagat is a youth icon and acclaimed author of contemporary Indian literary landscape. He wrote his novels with modern perspective, but patriarchy is deeply rooted in the minds of Indian society. Marriage is the social institution which played a role against the emancipation of women, opposed her modern outlook and perspectives, created stereotypes, and supported traditional gender roles. Article 14 and article 15 of Indian constitution provides for equality before law and prohibit discrimination on the ground of sex, gender, race and religion etc. However, Patriarchy is relevant and much deeply rooted in the psyche of third world countries like India. In the novel ‘Five Point Someone’ Protagonist Neha have to deal with her father conservative patriarchal mindset. Professor Cherian proscribed her to talk the boys and dictates her to whom she have to befriend with. Education empowered the Indian women, provided them more bargaining power or freedom to choose their life partner but this freedom to choose their life partners is not absolute and often comes with caveats from patriarchal mindset and gender stereotypes. In the novel ‘Two States: The story of my marriage’, Protagonist Ananya wanted to marry her boyfriend Krish but her parents opposed her decision. She told that her parents were conservative. Conservative mindset leads to gender stereotypes and patriarchal perspectives, which are against the tenets of feminism. These stereotypes equate women with pride and property, and scuttle the decision making power even of educated women. Traditions and cultural artefacts play the active role towards indoctrinating women with patriarchal ideas. This type of indoctrination of women further complicate the issue of gender equality and feministic rights. Education on the plank of gender equality and sensitizing the society towards the feministic rights can become a watershed movement in curtailing gender stereotypes and subduing chauvinistic patriarchal mindset.

**Keywords:** Feminism, patriarchy, gender stereotypes, traditions, marriage, Educated Indian Woman

**Introduction:** Chetan Bhagat is a youth icon, famous and proclaimed author of contemporary Indian literary landscape. Chetan Bhagat was born in 1974, his father was an Army man and his mother was a scientist in Indian Agriculture Research Institute. He graduated from IIT Delhi in 1995 and passed out from IIM Ahmedabad in 1997. He wrote his novels with modern perspective but patriarchy is deeply rooted in the minds of Indian society. Marriage is the social institution which always played a role against the emancipation of women, opposed her modern outlook and perspectives, created stereotypes, and supported traditional gender roles. Patriarchy is relevant and much deeply rooted in the psyche of third world countries like India compared to Western Developed countries where woman voices are heard in more pragmatic way. Education empowered the Indian women, provided them more bargaining power or freedom to choose their life partner but this freedom to choose their life partners is not absolute and often comes with caveats from patriarchal mindset and gender stereotypes. These stereotypes equate women with pride and property, and scuttle the decision making power even of educated women. In the novels, ‘Five Point Someone’ and ‘Two States: The Story of My Marriage’, female protagonists are educated Indian women but gender stereotypes and patriarchal mindset often undermined their liberal and feministic ideas.

**Feminism in India:** Feminism is a movement worldwide for the rights of women, and advocated equality, autonomy and self-respect for women at par with men. “In Indian writing feminism has been used as modest attempt for evaluating the real social scenario as women are concerned. There are several novels in English literature of India that actually portrays the actual status of the women in Indian Societies. However, the modern aged women have realized that they are equally competent like the men and they are not helpless unlike the past when men were considered as the sole bread earners, in today’s age, women too have become direct money earners of any household. Today’s contemporary Indian English novelists are writing for masses using the theme of feminism, which not only interests the readers but also affects them.”(Kadu)

Feminism in India is having historical and mythological aspects. “While one cannot say with certainty when the idea of feminism took root in the Indian subcontinent, the legislative fight for women’s right seems to have begun during the era of colonialism. For example, over the span of two centuries, through the efforts of many regional emperors, non- British colonists, law reformers, as well as British colonists culminated in the 1829 law condemning the cultural practice of Sati-when a windowed woman would be burnt alive in her husband’s funeral pyre. In a society where a woman’s value and identity had always been in relation to the men in her life, there was an increased risk to women’s lives when there were no longer men present to protect them. This, along with other beliefs, led to self-immolation being concluded as one of the only options for widowed women.”(Rangarajan)

After the India’s independence atrocities against women continued, women were considered as guardians of traditions. “The emphasis, in modern Indian feminism, is on self-recognition, self-worth, self-image, which could have been harmed because of systematic oppression, and misogynistic practices that lead women to believe that they are incapable of contributing to society. This focus on ‘the self’ is problematic in a society where more norms and traditions are dictated by the concepts of collectivism and putting others before oneself.”(Rangarajan)

Feminism in India passed through different phases of time and struggle for feministic rights. In a nut shell, it passed through the phase of abolition of sati in 1829, demand of widow remarriage and woman education, enshrinement of legal provisions in Indian Constitution for gender equality and against gender discrimination at the time of Indian independence, to the emergence of a new educated and career oriented woman in contemporary times. But these feministic rights and legal provisions are not absolute often infringed upon by gender stereotypes. According to Poonam Punia, “Although the feminists and feminist authors have been successful in accomplishing the legal rights for females, yet much has to be done at social level.”(Punia)

**Gender Equality:** Article 14 and article 15 of Indian constitution provides for equality before law and prohibit discrimination on the ground of sex, gender, race and religion etc. Gender equality is enshrined in Indian constitution but in Indian society tenets of these articles rarely followed. Instances of gender discrimination declined in contemporary times but not completely stopped. Rights available to Indian women, and discrimination against Indian women having caste and class variations. Dalit women are subjected to more violence and discrimination than upper caste women. “A Dalit woman is a dual victim, firstly she is an object to work tirelessly; secondly, and she is a victim of sexual assault. Many female Dalit writers took serious note of the plight to bring the pain of Dalit women through literary works.”(Rasheed)

Society can play an active role in ensuring gender equality but in India it seldom occurs. Human rights and gender equality are intrinsically linked to sustainable development. Western

countries reached on the zenith of economic development due to their commitment towards feministic rights and zero tolerance towards gender discrimination. According to R.Priya “Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is significant to the belief of human rights for all. The overall objective of gender equality may be a society during which women and men enjoy an equivalent opportunities, rights and obligations altogether sphere of life Equality between men and ladies exists when both sexes are ready to share equally within the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through fixing businesses; enjoy equal access to education and therefore the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the house and youngsters and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender- based violence both at work and reception. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to catch up on women’s historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.”(Priya)

Gender affiliations strengthen at family and society level. Family is the smallest segment of the society which initially plays active role in defining gender roles and projecting gender stereotypes. According to Dr Sona Gaur, “Family plays the most constructive role among such agents in the child’s socialization. It is a social institution which is a brewery for the childhood conditioning. In a patriarchal family, girls and boys are raised differently and trained differently in terms of their behavior, habits, clothes, attitudes and even games. Young girls are conditioned to adhere to their secondary status in a family. What begins in infancy continued through the years.”(Gaur)

**Feministic Perspectives in ‘Five Point Someone’:** Five Point Someone is the Chetan Bhagat first novel, and it was published in 2005. The main theme of novel was about the shortcomings of Indian education system, and how this system stifled innovations, promoted rote learning and exam oriented curriculum. But analyzing this novel from feministic perspectives, we came across patriarchal mindset, Conservative views for women and not providing freedom to women in crucial decisions of their life. According to Dr Pramod Kumar Singh in the past also, Indian feminist have fought against patriarchal mindset to achieve feministic rights related to social cultural issues, “Indian feminists also have fought against socio-cultural issues within India’s patriarchal society, such inheritance law and the practice of widow immolation known as ‘Sati’.”(Singh)

**Patriarchal Mindset in Five Point Someone:** Patriarchal mindset is deep rooted in the Indian society even in educated families. University and College Professors which are the pillars of Indian education system, and proponents of gender equality and liberal educated thought in the society. But in reality patriarchal mindset is ingrained in their psyche. In the novel Professor Cherian is projected educated, disciplined, knowledgeable, guide and counselor for his college students’ type of personality. But his thoughts transforms into traditional, conservative and patriarchal in the matter of his own daughter Neha. According to Dr. Racheti Anne Margaret, “It was important for the experiences of women under the patriarchal influence to come out to the forefront and expose the undue cruelty be held on them by men. It was necessary for the women to oppose this male dominance over them.”(Margaret)

Professor Cherian’s daughter Neha told to her friend Hari “My dad is really strict about me talking to boys and he will totally flip out if he hears I am friends with a student” Professor Cherian told to Hari, “Don’t tell me what to think. I knew my daughter was distracted these days. God, and because of scum like you! You stay away from my home and my daughter. Just away, understand?”(Bhagat, Five Point Someone)

The above lines clearly depict the misogynistic and patriarchal attitude of Professor Cherian, Head of department of the college towards women. He refrained his daughter even talk to the boys. It is explicitly evident that torch bearers of education are having conservative and patriarchal mindset. They promotes gender stereotypes and linked the women to honour of family. In reality, society have equated the girls with possessions, family pride and honour. Prof Cherian curtailed the freedom of expression of his daughter and defined to whom she have to talk and befriend with. Freedom of expression enshrined in article 19 of Indian Constitution. Even in the educated Indian families feudal mindset of male members persists towards daughters and sisters. Male members of the family dictates the terms and conditions of how and to whom girls express their opinion. It is clear violation of article 14 'article of equality before law' and article 19 'freedom of expression' of Indian constitution. So this type of conditions and violation of fundamental rights persists for girls in educated Indian families and so we can imagine what will be the conditions regarding freedom of expression and gender equality in uneducated and marginalized Indian families.

**Love letters are considered taboos even in educated Indian families:** Love letters and befriending with boys are proscribed for girls even in the educated Indian families. Cherian shouted at Hari, thought that Hari is giving love letter to his daughter Neha. He reprimanded Hari, "What is it, you rascal? Cherian said looking at me, his fist still firmly on the letter, love letters you write to trap my daughter. I told you to stay away from her. So one Disco wasn't enough?" (Bhagat, Five Point Someone)

In the above lines Prof Cherian rebuked Hari because he thought that Hari is holding love letter for his daughter Neha. This depict that Indian girls have to refrain from love making and befriending with boys which are not approved by their fathers. Even the liberal, educated Indian fathers proscribe love affairs and love letters when the matter is related to their daughters. In Indian households love letters are considered taboos, girls can't openly discuss their love affairs with their fathers. Educated gender stereotypes further complicated the issue gender equality because society at large emulates the ideology and actions of these persons. Gender parity and women rights take back seat due to the actions of these type of stereotypes.

**Feministic Perspectives in 'Two States: The story of my marriage':** In the novel 'Two States: The story of my marriage', Protagonist Ananya wanted to marry her boyfriend Krish but her parents opposed her decision. They opposed her marriage with Krish because he is from different culture and traditions. She told that her parents are conservative. Conservative mindset leads to gender stereotypes and patriarchal perspectives, which are against the tenets of feminism. Women in Indian society are considered as protectors and proponents of the traditions. These traditions often work against women emancipation and gender equality. Women have to bear the brunt of protecting the traditions, culture and customs.

**Traditions and Customs are congruous with the Ideas of Patriarchal Gender Stereotypes:** Traditions and customs justified the gender stereotypes and instigates patriarchal chauvinism. Ananya wrote in letter to Krish, "Guess what, I am wearing jasmine flowers in my hair today! It helps to have a traditional look in the interiors. I broke a few petals and have included them in this letter. Hope they remind you of me." (Bhagat, Two States: The Story Of My Marriage)

The above lines depict that cultural artefacts in the form of Jasmine flowers are essential for girls to keep traditional Tamilian look. Traditional look is considered amicable by patriarchal gender stereotypes. Even an IIM (Indian Institute of Management) educated girl Ananya wants to keep her

traditional look because this look provide her a tag of good girl which having the approval of patriarchal society. Traditions helps the gender stereotypes to propel their anti- feministic agenda. Traditions and customs have succeeded in engraining the thought that traditional looking women are good women, even in the mind of an educated woman like Ananya.

**Power and freedom of expression in Indian society is associated with patriarchal order and its proponents:**Power and freedom of expression in Indian societylinked with patriarchal order and persons directly associated with it. So the view of a married man’s sister got more prominence in the family than his wife whenever these views are in consonance with patriarchal order. Radha is Ananya’s mother and Shobha is the sister of Ananya’s father in the novel. Shobha gave some advice to Ananya mother, that time Ananya father told his wife, “Radha, you must listen to Shobha. She knows best, Ananya’s father said. Indian men slam their wives for their sisters with zero hesitation.”(Bhagat, Two States: The Story Of My Marriage)

In Indian patriarchal society, women with patriarchal views often got appreciation than those women who criticize this system and instigates feministic perspectives. So power equations in the family and society favours to the proponents of patriarchal order. In brief thesepower equations are always detrimental to women empowerment and promotes gender stereotypes.

**While selecting Bridegroom opinion of family matter more than Bride views.** In the conservative Indian society views of family matter more than the bride view while choosing bridegroom. In the novel,“Manju told about Harish, the poster boy of the perfect Tamilian groom. Radha aunty had pitched Harish for the last two years. He fit every criteria applied by Indian parents to make him a worthwhile match for Ananya. He was Tamilian, a Brahmin and an Iyer (and those are three separate things, and non-compliance in any can get you disqualified). He had studied in IIT Chennai and had scored a GPA of 9.45(yes, it was advertised to the Swamis). Krish told that “And we thought our love is enough reason for us to get married. We thought our parents will meet at the convocation and things will be smooth. Well, we were wrong.”(Bhagat, Two States: The Story Of My Marriage)

Fundamental right of choosing life partner for girls is often infringed by the family members in Indian society. Gender stereotypes in the family often dictates the terms and conditions while selecting grooms for girls. Even the opinion of educated girls in the family often impinged by conservative and patriarchal mindset in family. Educated and financial independent women also have to fraught withchallenges imposed by gender stereotypes while choosing their grooms.

**Girls’ behaviour often equated with family honour and pride:**Even the educated girls in Indian society have to follow the code and conduct of the society in a sacrosanct manner. Girls’ attitude and behaviour is associated with family honor. Slightest deviation from these norms often understood as tinkering with family pride and honour. When Ananya told to her mother that Krish is my boyfriend, her mother replied, “You are my daughter, do you understand? You are spoiling our name in the community, do you understand? I brought you up, educated you, made sacrifices for you, do you understand?”(Bhagat, Two States: The Story Of My Marriage)

Education provided opportunities for woman to become financially independent but not enough to deal with patriarchal and gender stereotypes chauvinism. Educated Indian woman have to confront with this type of conservative and misogynistic mindset while taking crucial decisions of their life.

**Conclusion:** Fundament rights of gender equality and freedom of expression are enshrined in our constitution. Any infringement of these rights, we can file writ petition in Supreme Court of Indian

under Article 32 and we can approach High Courts under article 226 of Indian constitution. But these provisions of Indian constitution are not followed by Indian society in letter and spirit. Gender stereotypes and patriarchal mindset often prevailed upon gender equality and woman empowerment ethos. Girls' behavior often equated with family honour. So honour killings are rampant in India. Girls have to follow the code of conduct of family like to whom they have to talk and befriend with. In the educated Indian families also, girls views to choose their life partner often fraught with challenges. Traditions and cultural artefacts play the active role towards indoctrinating women with patriarchal ideas. This type of indoctrination of women further complicate the issue of gender equality and feministic rights. Education on the plank of gender equality and sensitizing the society towards the feministic rights can become a watershed movement in curtailing gender stereotypes and subduing chauvinistic patriarchal mindset.

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