WOMEN OF 21ST CENTURY: ANALYSIS OF 2 STATES OF CHETAN BHAGAT

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ABSTRACT

Inequalities between men and women and discrimination on the ground of gender have been age-old issues all over the world. Women’s expedition for equivalence with men is a widespread phenomenon. The position, on which women were in the 18th and 19th centuries in India when they were not more than an object that can be bought and sold at anytime, anywhere, when they were confined within the four walls of their household, and totally dependent on menfolk, has witnessed the graph of upliftment. They are no more enchained with the shackles of Pardha (Veil system), child marriage, sati system (hara-kiri by the women with their spouses), dowry system and the state of permanent widowhood. The women, in the present day, are playing the role of protagonist in all the walks of life be it architecture, medicine, law, fiscal services, engineering and IT jobs. They are balancing their peculiar and professional life with great expertise. Literature, that presents mirror to society, shows the evolvement of women from sheer family janitor to self-supported personages of the present times. The present paper is an attempt to show the status of women in this contempo era where they are enjoying themselves like free flora and fauna with no net of restrictions. Through the delineation of character of Annanya Swaminathan of 2 States, Chetan Bhagat, youth icon of modern adolescents, a fictionist of newfangled aeon with the credit of six Best sellers, greases his elbows for the plenary emancipation of women. His novels raise a stout remonstration against male dominating society where women are disowned the liberty to act and live in accordance with their heart’s desire. Women in his novels are exemplified as sexually liberated and free intellectuals who have been termed as ‘New Woman’

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in childhood a woman should be under her father’s control, in youth under her husband’s and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence…. (Buhler 1992)

Along these lines, it becomes unclouded that since coon’s age women have been tyrannized and under men’s thumb. It is a vile which preponderated all over the world. Girls are still compressed on the ground of family, liabilities, copouts and numerous others. Still the society witnesses more than a few families who fraught womens since they ponder them much mediocre to men and retain the mindset that women can do nothing and consequently, the parents have final word of everything about the future of their offspring till that extend to which type of education and where to get education from.

Women have always been a cardinal and vital part of literature as well. If we take a quick glimpse at literature we will get an eyeful of the evolvement of women from sheer family janitor to self-supported personages of the present times.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, the representative poet of the Victorian Age epitomized the ancillary image of women in one of his poems:

“Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion” (427–431)
The below cited lines make it luminous that not only Tennyson but John Donne, father of the Metaphysical poetry, advocated the same when he says that women should be designated to confine themselves to homes only alike the fixed leg of compass. It is men, who like moving leg of compass, go way out and travel around. In the poem Valediction: forbidding Mourning he says-

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.
And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erects, as that comes home.
Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th’ other foot, obliquely run;

Being sterling adumbrative of society, literature raises a mirror to society, presents realism, everything that is in one way or the other allied to the society. The literature of bygone days presents the picture of women covered with many thick layers of chauvinisms, witlessness, convention, cageyness etc.

With the passage of time, everything takes the apparel of new, covers itself with new veil of amendment and expansion so with the condition of women. They are no longer a Sita or a Damanyanti, they are Draupadi. With the growth of feminism, a socio political movement which is fought against female oppression under patriarchy brought with it a new dimension, a new direction for the women. Every literary genius of contemporary era demands for women empowerment presents their female characters as rebellious Indian women who are standing in opposition of orthodoxy of social taboos.

Mention can be made of Chetan Bhagat, an Indian novelist whose fictional writings have restored to him incredible accomplishment and this would not be a hyperbole, if it is said, that these have gained for him the reputation of one of the best seller writers of the world. He keeps his eyes on women empowerment in society and earnestly depicts women in true colors, in his novels.

As fictionist of newfangled aeon, youth icon of modern adolescents, he greases his elbows for the plenary emancipation of women. His novels raise a stout remonstration against male dominating society where women are disowned the liberty to act and live in accordance with their heart’s desire, where male despotism is acknowledged in all walks of life, where men have the birthright of doing whatever they yearn to take on, where rules and regulations are de rigueur only for women. C. Bhagatabolishes the distorted image of woman and presents the picture of his heroine who are powerful, rebellious, successful and who are alloy of physical freedom, sexual urge and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, women who can combine pleasure, career and marriage. They are eager to participate in pleasure as they would do in play, work etc.

Be it Neha, Vidya, Priyanka, Annanya or Aarthi all are far more emphatic, dictatorial and audacious in comparison to men. They believe in “Better to die fighting for freedom than be a prisoner all the days of life” (Bob Marley).

Ages ago, women were not let on to prettify themselves in the way they liked. They were in need of carte blanche of their concerned men, for the first 15 to 20 years from the father and then from husbands. The professed fathers of society, abettor of religions used to clinch what to be worn or not to be by the women. But the women of today do not bestow this right to anybody. They take their own decisions and do not appreciate the nosiness of even their loved ones.

Annanya does not like anybody to give voice to anything about the way in which she likes to deck out herself. She takes pleasure in wearing too tiny shorts. She feels bad when Krishavers her to dress properly when they
arrive at conclusion to go for food. She dresses herself that draw extra fleeting look from boy. Krish admonishes as he feels that Annanya, in such type of dress, will be an eye tonic for boys. Noticing this, she advocates the freedom.


Not only in look but in thoughts also Annanya is twenty first century girl. Annanya is gallant to that extent to talk about her virginity loss in front of a boy. When she gets knowledge of Harish with whom her parents wants to fix her marriage, she very boldly suggests him not to marry her as she is no more virgin which is for sure the most valuable thing that a girl can gift to her partner after marriage.

“Harish, if there is an entrance exam for virginity, you can be sure I won’t top it”(129)

She is the one who can be said the synonym of freedom, a girl that respects other but who can’t compromise when someone tries to put question mark on her self-respect, on her liberty.

Krish’s mother doesn’t admire the way in which Annanya lives and behaves. It is his mother’s point of view who feels that this type of girl can’t be a good daughter-in-law.

“We don’t have bahus in Punjabis like that, no matter how high-profile. We keep them straight…I don’t want my daughter-in-law to raise her voice or answer me back. She has to be under my thumb.”(227)

How can this be unobjectionable for Annanya? She tells Krish, “So, I will be taught to toe the line after marriage. Well done, Krish, it’s not just your mother, it is you as well… I told my parents your mother will apologise. But you guys are making bigger plans.”(229)

The society also shows the evidence of that time when women, even though having a hunger for enlightenment, had been impoverished of the right of grasping knowledge by her own parents for the reason that she is a girl and girls do not need higher studies as they have to hog-tie themselves in reach of their houses so there is no purpose to fritter money on them, furthermore boys must have awarded the chance of receiving proficient or higher qualification due to the fact that they are men and it is the gender responsibility of men to look after their families, not of the women.

But today the situation has taken a new leaf. Today girls are getting more and more competent and skilled. They are getting the independence to get education wherever they like.

Annanya’s parents send her to IIM Ahmedabad so that she can ornament herself with the master’s degree from a well esteemed institution. She lives there with ‘no compromise attitude’. On the very first day of hers at IIM, she loses her temper when she finds that the food that is going to be delivered to the apprentices is not upto the mark.

“What you want? The mess worker said in a heavy South Indian accent. You calling rasam not rasam. You make face when you see my sambhar. I feed hundred people. They no complain.”( pg.no 4).

She thinks if the people complain, the thing will be much better as they are now.

Women of today are not alike those acquiescentkind of women of long-gone days who used to devote their lives behind the barred windows of half dark rooms, who spent year after year of their existence in washing clothes, doing household chores. Now be it academia or professional world, they are playing their active role.

Annanya, after getting her degree, retains the obligation of manager of HLL, a company that has the kudos of manufacturing well known big brand. Krish feels pride when he shares with his mom that Annanya, the girl that he has selected to make his life partner, works in HLL.

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“How does it’s a good job.’

‘HLL?’

‘The company that makes Surf And Rin and Lifebuoy and Kissan sauce.’ I named products, hoping that one of them would impress her
‘Kissan Jams also?’ She asked after thinking for thirty seconds.

‘Yes, she is in marketing. It’s the most prestigious marketing job.’

The consequences of dowry, have been wide spreading even traced back to the womb. Where the birth of baby boy makes everybody feel to celebrate like festival, the very thought of a baby girl makes them to lament like in funerals. The parents who feel themselves not for to save for her all the life long, opt the option of female feticide because of the dowry they will have to shell out at the time of her marriage and throughout their life they will be under the burden of the stress due to the never ending demands of the in-laws. Few people acquire the opinion that bringing up a girl is like watering a neighbor’s plant. The most ironical part is that the in-laws, who are supposed to take care of bride as their own daughter, can go to any limit in order to fulfill their dowry related demands, even burning of girl.

With the extensive education of women, this state of mind of women has witnessed a great change and they feel that giving and taking dowry is nothing but a stigma on the society that has to be vanished at the earliest possible. They are not agreeable to get hitched on the ground of dowry as this way of selling and purchasing of bride and girl cannot fetch elongated sanctuity and happiness as well.

In spite of all lavish efforts, Minti’s parents come off with failure in making her in-laws impressed. The way in which Minti’s relatives are standing in front of her in-laws can, effortlessly, recap anyone the sight of landless farmer who waits for the feudal lords to respond. The reason of this strange behavior is that when Minti’s father hands over the key of Hyundai to Duke’s parents, they accept it as Hyundai Accent but later they find it as Santro which costs just half of Accent, only three lakh rupees. This is something amazing to everybody- that Duke’s parents feel insulted and cheated accepting Santro and as a result they decide to break the knot.

Having no choice, Minti’s parents promise to give Accent but this is not adequate for Duke’s parents to be convinced and the latter wants a guarantee, the difference in cash. Not to have so much cash available, Minti’s father places his turban at the feet of Duke’s parents but they are too callous to alter their mind.

This is something unendurable to Annaya who is of view that this category of people deserve only one place in the whole world and that is prison. She feels that this is not going to be wise pronouncement to marry Minti into a family of total jerks.

Annanya, with the permission of Minti’s parents, asks Duke the reason why he should get such a high price as dowry?

“How much do you make? Annanya said

Ten thousand a month, he said, in a heavy Punjabi accent.

Great, I make twenty-five thousand. Still, can you tell me what have you done to deserve a wedding like this? What have you done to deserve a car to be gifted to you?”

‘I, I am the boy’s side,’ Duke stammered.

‘So? Have you seen Minti?’ Annanya said.

Duke nodded.

You are having an arranged marriage. That is why you are getting a girl like her. If you had to woo her, how can you even in your dreams have a girlfriend like her? (213)

Annanya’s eye opening statements make him realized how wrong he and his parents are in their demand of Accent. Duke makes it clear that he will marry with Minti without taking anything in the name of dowry.

“Daddy I have kept quiet for long, no? Everything you have decided. Now whatever it is, don’t spoil my marriage...Mummy, enough! and why this drama of keeping their jewellery? What do you think? I can’t buy my own car?” (215)

Inspite of her heart felt love for Krish, she refuses to get married to him when his mom, time and again, tries to humiliate Annanya’s parents for the sake of dowry.

“Actually, Punjabis are quite large-hearted people. We like to live well when we meet people, we give them nice gifts...we never meet anyone empty handed. Oh and meeting the boy’s side empty-handed, unthinkable.” (pg223)
Annanya demands apology from Krish’s mother as she has behaved in that way with her parents that indecently. Krish mother’s refusal of saying sorry to Annanya’s parents lead to Annanya’s no to marriage.

After so many years of Independence, Indians are still bound with the shackles of narrow mindedness as they can’t accept any thing crossing the so called boundaries of caste, creed and religion. It is the country where parents are still having the remote control of their children’s happiness.

“Love Marriage around the world is simple. Boy loves girl, girl loves boy, and they get married. But in India it’s not that simple. Boy loves girl, girl loves boy. Boy’s family has to love girl and girl's family has to love boy. Boy’s family has to love girl’s family and girls’ family has to love boy’s family.”

But being the representative of modern society, Annannya does not find anything wrong that can bring defamation for her and her family only because she has set her mind to get married with Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy with whom she had studied and shared room during her days at IIM Ahmedabad.

She does not agree with Krish when he tells Annanya that this relationship will bring them a big parcel of hardships, as duos hail from different caste, different culture and different state. He says,

“…and you are South Indian, which does not help at all. Ok, its not as bad as marrying someone from another religion. But pretty close (40).

He expects the same kind of reactions from her parents

“…aren’t your parents going to flip out when they find out you have Punjabi boy friend?”(40).

She feels that these stupid biases and discrimination are the reason due to which India is so screwed up. In India, inspite of national anthem, national currency, national teams, and people can’t marry outside the state, outside caste and community.

Bhagat has presented the character of Annanya as a youth icon of India who in spite of her immeasurable love for her darling, does not want to marry with him without her parents’ willingness.

“… Annanya told me she had this dream of both sets of parents smiling on our wedding day. And so, I want to see if we can do that. Also I didn’t think we had done anything wrong that we had to run away.”(183)

In spite of being very modern she has dream of marriage with their parents’ presence as Annanya says,

“I wouldn’t know what to do. I don’t want to hurt them. I already have by choosing a Punjabi mare, but I think we can win them over.I want them to smile on my wedding day. That’s how I imagined my marriage since I was a child…”(pg102)

The compassion of Krish’s heart and dexterity of his mind win the heart of Annanya’s family and her father gives approval by taking a promise to take care of his daughter still they fear the way in which Krish’s parents will react after knowing about this relationship.

To find the love of her man, she has to go under so many tests. To bowl his mom over, he suggests her to help his mom in preparing dinner, a thing in which Annanya is not at all at ease.

“Yeah mom, why don’t you let Annanya make dinner today?”(pg 192)

To make her feel impressed, Annanya nods her head as she is willing by heart to prepare dinner for them. But like most of Punjabi mother-in-law Kavita can’t be tolerate this. To make the situation miserable for Annanya, she makes a long listed menu for dinner.

“ Krish likes gobialoo. I thought we will also make black daal, raita and salad.”(192)

Ignorant to all this, she ignited the flame and put the vegetable on high flame, as a result all the spices get overcooked and a pungent smoke rises from the kitchen. Noticing this, his mother steps into the kitchen and starts to criticize Annanya as she meets with failure in preparing dinner as she feels that Annanya can only cook the schemes to trap her son.

“See, this is how she will use you after marriage. She can’t even make rotis”
“…You are under her spell. You bring her home. You knead atta for her. You give her two frootis I had brought for guests. You are so worried about her. What about me?” (194)

Her love for Krish is so intense that she does not lose heart and puts her genuine efforts to get his mother’s consent and finally get success in that.

Communal rubrics have always been punitive on women in India. It is vindicated that a man, as an independent being, can have extra nuptial affairs. The society doesn’t raise eye brows to married men who take delight in with either prostitutes or whores by paying them in cash or kind. Not a soul bothers to ponder about the woman who is isolated in her home with a ray of hope for her husband who doesn’t come nights after nights. What would she do in such condition?

She can’t take her life or shambles herself by crying. A woman is, on a societal ground, half-finished without the being of man in her life and its vetoed to enjoy any erotic relationship with any man other than her husband. Her desire for sexual relationship is subordinated to the interest of the society, not on her individual feeling. Sex is almost a personal property or a fundamental right of men. It is common mentality that woman is only an object which can be used any time in any way to fulfill his desire. Indian men feel privilege enough to have a taste of it but the very moment they come to know that their mother, sister, wife, daughter are inclined towards it, their mentality take 180° degree change. How can they forget that the lady with whom they are sleeping, is someone’s something?

Chetan Bhagat’s female characters are exceptions of those typical, submissive type of Indian women. His women are not shilly-shally in breaking the virginity knot without a single straw of consideration of social rites and rituals. Bhagat is of opinion that women are on same level on which men are and own equal right to demand sex. He shows that the demand of sex is comparatively more dominant in girls contrasting to the traditional Indian girls. He delineates the character of Annanya, heroine of his autobiographical novel, as a daring girl who initiates to kiss. As one thing leads to another, this kiss results in pre-marital sex. After having sex, Annanya, very boldy confesses:

“This is my first time” (26)

The scene of physical intimacy of Krish and Annanya is also introduced in the middle part of the novel when krish, after deciding to win Annanya with her parents’ approval, goes to Chennai. Being the paying guest of a landlord who hates to bring Non-veg and beer in his house, Krish is not expected to call Annanya in his flat this stated reason. Krish, who did not have sex for four months, is dying to have Annanya in his arms to enjoy corporal intercourse with her.

“We kissed and kissed and kissed some more. Our lovemaking was more intense, not only because we did it after a long time, but also we are doing in this stuck-up city for the first time.” (101)

After having sex for so many times, Annanya finds herself in love with Krish and asks the same to Krish who feels himself not at ease in giving the answer of question and this makes her a bit upset as She says:

“How you men need so much time to think about commitment but how you need no time at all to decide when you have to sleep with the girl” (32)

Annanya Swaminathan is characterized as the modern girl, modern till the extent of negligence of culture. She uses ‘F’ words and wants to smoke; she also drinks beer

“Do you like Chicken…? Do you have beer…?
But Gandhi ji won us freedom…. What is the point of getting people free only to put restrictions on them?” (6)

“You will feed me chicken. I am dying to have non-veg and get some beer too.” (98)

“Who the F.k wants that? I feel like a real smoke.
What? Am I not allowed to use F words or is it that I expressed a desire to smoke?” (20)

I. CONCLUSION

The empowerment of women has become one of the most burning issues of 21st century. Efforts of the government are on to ensure gender equality but that alone can’t serve the purpose until or unless women become
aware of the power of self, the power of their existence and join hands to create that climate of society in which there is no discrimination on the basis of gender, where women possess freedom in all regard be it educational, social, political and so on. The character of Annanya presented by Chetan Bhagat can be taken as youth icon who is not ready to compromise with her respect, her parents’ respect or anything that can create obstacles in her right of freedom. If each and every woman realizes her value and power, great change will be there in society positively.

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